

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA

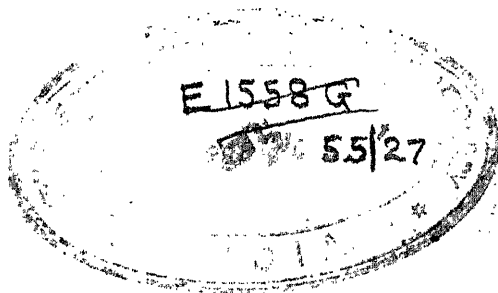
CENTRAL
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
LIBRARY

ACCESSION NO. 38886

CALL No. 923.1517/Chi/Win.

D.G.A. 79

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST





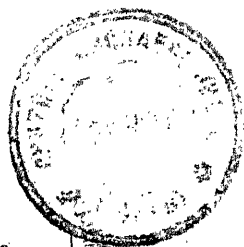
THE COURT OF CHINGHIZ KHAN.

From a Photograph by M. Paul Lemare, Paris.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

MRS. ALFRED WINGATE

83586



Library E1558(2)

INDIA

923.1517

Ch/Win

CROSBY LOCKWOOD
By Stationers Hall-London.

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1927
By Crosby Lockwood & Son
7, Stationers' Hall Court, London, E.C. 4

CENTRAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL
LIBRARY, NEW B. H.

Acc. No. 38886

Date.....20.12.62

Call No.923.1517 chifwin

DEDICATED

TO

文



Creak of waggons and tread of horses,
Yak tail banner ahead unfurled,
Mighty men of the Mongol forces,
Out to conquer the easy world.

*Short their stirrups and loose their rein,
How shall we see them come again ?*

Wives and children, fathers and mothers
Cling or speed them for an hour.
Dust clouds cover them. Forward, brothers !
Ours the road without a flower.

*Joy of battle or battle's pain,
When will they know it once again ?*

Salt of desert and snow of borders,
Dew that freezes upon their steel,
Sleep in saddle, awake to orders,
War gongs sounding and horses' squeal.

*Moon alone in that empty plain,
Where have the riders gone again ?*

While the foeman of old time rallies,
While he unfolds his endless scheme,
Ravens croak in the homeland valleys,
Idle Mongols look on and dream.

*Very Mighty, our fires wane,
Rise up and lead us forth again !*

P R E F A C E

THE life of Chingiz Khan is an epic to which no encyclopædia nor any ordinary novel can do justice. But, in a book like this, there is danger of falling between the two stools of imagination and fact, and research may not prevent the imputation of an effort to whitewash an enemy of civilisation.

If, however, as the Chinese say, "The future is only the past again," then, in order to understand what is happening in the Chinese Republic to-day, we must look into the past and consider without prejudice the life story of a man, whose character and actions bear comparison with those of Alexander, of Frederick the Great and of Napoleon I. Such characters may be antipathetic, but they must be recognised as supermen and history is not content to dismiss them as despots or blood-stained monsters. Moreover, in judging the Mongols, account must be taken of the condition of European civilisation in the 13th century. It is open to doubt whether, at that period, the word "Barbarians," so freely applied to the Eastern invaders, was not more applicable to the Western invaded.

Chingiz Khan and his descendants set an enduring mark upon the world : physiologically by their interpenetration of peoples ; psychologically by their introduction to the West of Oriental thought ; politically by founding the Mongol dynasty in China and that of the Mo(n)guls in India.

Perhaps, therefore, this tale of a great adventure, founded on historical facts, may help to arouse among Western

PREFACE

peoples a greater interest in the struggles for power now in operation over the immense area of what was, a couple of decades ago, the Chinese Empire : an area comprising nearly one quarter of the estimated population of the world.

The authorities on which I have relied are given in the Bibliography at the end of the book, but special mention must be made of my debt to the late Professor Jeremiah Curtin, whose *History of the Mongols*, published by Sampson Low and Marston, London, and Little Brown and Co., Boston, deserves to be better known and appreciated.

The late Sir H. Hoyle Howorth is responsible for the temporary identification of Prester John with Wang Khan of the Keraites. The notes of Sir Henry Yule and Monsieur Henri Cordier on Marco Polo have provided further elucidation of the subject. The quest of Chingiz Khan and its symbolic conclusion are my own idea.

The incidental stories of Temudjin and the Thunderstorm, The Bright Moon of Otrar, the Carpenter and The Merchant of Chung Tu and Ala Kush Tegin, Guardian of the Wall, are the only other imaginative lights of the narrative.

The illustrations are from photographs of miniatures in the mutilated MS volume of the *Djami-el-Tawarikh* of Fazel oullah Raschid (date 1303), now in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, and my thanks are due to Monsieur E. Blochet and other officials of the Département des Manuscrits.

I desire also to acknowledge the help of Sir Dennison Ross, of Monsieur Henri Cordier and of Mr. J. F. Baddeley, and finally of Mr. Crosby Lockwood, most sympathetic of publishers.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

CHAPTER I

IN a mountainous area of North Eastern Asia, covering some two hundred miles, six rivers rise. The Onon, the Ingoda and the Kerulon flow east to lose themselves in the great Amoor. The Tula, the Orhon and the Selinga, rising in the Kentei Khan range, north of the Gobi Desert, feed Lake Baikal and thence flow through the Lower Angora and the Yenissei into the Arctic Ocean. These rivers have their tributary streams and the region they water is one of grass covered hills and plains, forests of fir and oak, vast tracts of unspoiled Nature beneath a vast expanse of sky.

The most salient point of the great Mongolian plateau is an impression of intense light. The unbroken horizons, the ocean-like expanse of the Steppes, inspire man with restless longings and far reaching thoughts. He knows himself an atom in infinite space, and has a keener appreciation of his place in the Universe than he can ever have in smaller countries.

If he wanders, he finds as the boundaries of this land, snow topped mountain groups greater than the Alps, pointing ever upward, beckoning ever onward and catching the rosy glows of dawn and sunset. If he crosses these boundaries, he finds leagues of desert, where he hears the bells of distant caravans and sometimes sees the slow pacing camels, accompanied by ant-like figures.

In this world, man has no abiding place, but his spirit returns to God Who gave it. God is in the snows and in

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

the foothills, in the desert and in the grassland, in the trees which gather like armies on the river banks and stream across the valleys, in the solitudes and in the keen vitalising air. In this country there is no escape from the face of the living God, Whose voice is in the thunder of summer storms and in the rumble of Lake Baikal's winter ice.

Merciless are the storms of the open Steppes and terrible the tumult of Baikal, that inland sea, encompassed by mountains, whether its water is tossed in angry waves by perpetual winds, or frozen in solid ramparts by an internal labour and travail.

But the people who wander through the country south east of Baikal, recognise the divinity of these natural forces, and, though they acknowledge the supremacy of Heaven, they set up in the place of honour, at the doorways of their dwellings, and propitiate with offerings of food, images of sun-baked mud or felt, that symbolise the male and female elements and the law of earth.

Over the hills and plains, these people still herd their horses and their cattle. The number of their families and of their stock, once to be counted in hundreds of thousands is now reduced by their departure from the old laws, by their adoption of the decadent Lama form of Buddhism, which has gathered their young men into distant monasteries of the Yellow Cap Sect, and by the increase of desiccation throughout Central Asia, which has made the land barren. Still, when the Autumn winds bring a promise of snow, they drift down from the upper grasslands to the more sheltered valleys. Covered khibitkas, or bullock carts of the rudest shape, sheep, cows, sturdy long tailed ponies, some mounted with riders sitting crouched with short stirrups and carrying falcons on their wrists, some led, some mares and foals running free, men, women and children on foot, more and more horses, they stream down to their winter camping

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

ground. There in a few hours spring up many lines of tent shaped huts or yurts, composed of raw hide, stretched over a bamboo frame, open all round for ventilation at the base and having a smoke hole at the top. Men and cattle scatter over the plains, smoke rises from camp fires. And while women sit near the tents and churn the mares' milk in leathern vessels to *kumiss*, children run about to collect the horse dung into mounds for *argol* fuel.

They remain a virile and a hardy race, chiefly occupied with the business of existence. Their broad and smiling faces testify to an abiding sense of humour. Their brawny, well knit figures mark them as born to the saddle. Their dark skins and bright eyes, beneath sloping lids, suit surroundings, in which they appear neither hideous nor fearful, any more than rocks or roots are, in their own places, unseemly. Before all, they are a cheery people, quick, full of talk and song and laughter, knowing no fear and practising few deceits, having gigantic appetites and living amidst the pleasant wholesome scents of horse flesh, leather and sheepskin.

The Mongol characteristics have not changed and, since the Middle Ages, the country they inhabit has not altered.

The old law of Nature remains their most familiar law. Divine and irresistible, it holds sway over mountains, rivers, forests, beasts, birds and men.

With an august rhythm, that guides the construction of the tiniest sea shell and holds the stars in their courses, is the Law enacted. Its harmony is the music of the spheres, and its name is written on the Universe, the name of the Mightiest.

On a summer evening of the year of our Lord 1160, a Mongol gentleman rode out hawking on the bank of the river Onon. The cold air of the upland was like wine.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

The reed fringed water caught the rays of the setting sun and shone like burnished brass. Grey rocks jutted from the grey green turf of the hillside. Wild flowers grew in the longer grass below. A few gaunt pine trees seemed to have wandered from the dark belt of forest that lay along the northern slopes and to have stayed, lost and apart, with an air of wild surprise.

There were no sounds but the movements of the rider's white horse, the creak of leather and the jingle of bridle bells.

Presently, at a bend of the stream, he stopped and gazed over the valley, through which the river wound like a road. The mare turned her head to the east wind and pricked her fine ears and threatened the evening flies with a long swishing tail. Her feet were caked in mud to the fetlocks, but the muscles of flank and shoulder rippled under satin skin, and, though small, she had the healthy aspect of a creature beloved and cherished.

Her rider sat like one born to the saddle. On the wrist of his heavily gloved right hand, he carried a hooded peregrine falcon, which stayed immovable and looked as though it had been carved out of some precious substance by a master craftsman. To the bird's neck was attached a string of leather, which hung down to its gorge. The purpose of this was to bend the hawk's head against the wind, when it was in flight and to prevent it from soaring too high.

From the saddle bow hung a dead hare with stiff legs, stained white fur and glazed eyes; also several wild duck whose plumage had hardly lost the sheen of life.

The Mongol's dress showed him to be a person of consequence. His coat of soft leather was lined with fox skin and adorned with a pattern of bright coloured felt. His leather cap was decorated with the ornament known as the Botta—a heavy pointed square of wood, covered with silk,

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

surmounted with a high bunch of quills and surrounded at the base with the glowing feathers of a mallard's tail and uncut gems. He was, in fact, a Khan or chieftain of noble birth, known to forty thousand families of his tribe as Yessagai Bahadur, the ninth hero.

His age was perhaps thirty-five. The clear olive skin of his face was stretched smoothly over high cheek bones. His eyes, beneath slanting lids, were its most salient feature. Instead of being black like those of the majority of Mongols, their colour was a clear dark blue, and the depth of the pupil seemed to hold a reddish glow like fire, giving them an expression at once wild and proud. These extraordinary eyes were peculiar to the Khan's family and were taken as an indication of the divine ancestry he claimed, when the pure light of Heaven had procreated his race from the immaculate lady, Alan Goa.

Yessagai's ungloved left hand, which held the single bridle rein, was small and fine skinned with pointed fingers. Dropping the rein now, he took from a pouch attached to his girdle a small flat bottle of green jadeite. This he rested on the high pommel of his saddle and, withdrawing the jewelled stopper to which a miniature spoon was attached, he shook a pinch of snuff on to the back of his other thumb and raising it to his nose drew the scented dust into his nostrils.

A few moments later, he became aware of another horseman and an open bullock cart approaching from the south, on the opposite side of the stream. He looked long towards them, then trotting up the river he forded it at a shallow and continued more slowly to meet them.

At last he could see that the man, who rode a little in advance of the khibitka, was mounted on a piebald pony. He was not of Yessagai's own people, but evidently belonged to the tribe of the Merkits. His air of satisfaction proclaimed that he was returning to his own camping ground

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

after some successful foray or negotiation, which might be connected with what was carried in the bullock cart. He was armed with a spear, a long bow and a sheaf of arrows, but he appeared past the age when a man delights in fighting and sport. He had a big paunch, and from his round yellow face hung thin drooping moustaches and an attenuated grey beard.

Yessagai passed him with a polite salutation, to which he returned a cringing bow.

Then Yessagai drew aside to watch the khibitka. The humped bullocks with their meek eyes were driven by a woman, who sat behind them and urged them on with a stick. She was wrapped in a quilted coat of black cotton, which could not conceal her strong and youthful grace. Her countenance was comely and powerful, the colour of brown ivory stained with red on the cheek bones. Her expression was sullen, as though she followed the man against her will, but she looked neither to the right nor to the left.

Yessagai stared at her and suddenly she lifted her eyes and met his compelling gaze. They spoke no word, but in that moment the speech of the wild passed between them. It was the articulate silence of solitary places. The woman shuddered and turned her face away.

Yessagai looked after her, and marked the direction they were taking. Then, digging his heels into his horse's flanks, he galloped towards his own yurt.

The summer camping ground of the Mongols was on a plateau above a rich open valley, where sheep, oxen and horses strayed at will.

The beehive shaped tents of felt were grounded on foundations of twisted wicker. Their roofs, also of wicker, ran upwards into a chimney-like neck, which, covered with mortar, shone white in the sunshine, or were variegated with

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

designs in coloured felt. Before the doors of the yurts hung gay curtains, decorated in the same way with applied patterns of trees, birds, and flowers, that had the appearance of paintings.

These doors all faced towards the south, and the yurts were divided from each other by double ranks of carts laden with square wicker chests, covered with greased black felt. In these large hampers the Mongols kept all their treasures and household property.

The Khan's dwelling, set a little apart from the others, was distinguished by its size, the superiority of its decoration, its possession of lattice windows, the extent of its furniture and the erection before it of a standard surmounted with Yak tails.

The enormous waggons used for the removal of the yurts all standing, when they were drawn by as many as twenty-two bullocks yoked eleven abreast, were parked with high camel carriages, the transport for the weak or ailing, in the background. The stately two humped camels had a place to themselves. Dogs of a fierce and wolf-like breed were numerous and a hunting leopard, chained to a post, stretched itself in the sun.

The men were engaged in various occupations, some as blacksmiths, some as leather dressers, some as falconers, some as shepherds. A few were milking the mares for the preparation of the brew known as kumiss.

The long legged foals were tied to a line stretched between two posts and the anxious dams were standing near, deceived by the presence of their young into passivity. The women sat cutting or sewing felt in the shade of the tents, or repainted the household carts with vermilion and indigo and gold leaf, or busied themselves with the most important duty of the day, the making of kumiss and dried milk.

The fresh mare's milk was poured into a bladder, which

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

was then beaten with a hollow club of wood for some time. Under this process, first it fermented and then turned to butter. The fluid remaining was sour and had a taste of almonds. It was the national beverage of the Mongols and was mildly intoxicating.

The butter they used was not that yielded by the mares' but by the cows' milk. The curd remaining from this boiled butter-milk was dried in the sun till it became as hard as iron. It was then stored in bags until the winter, or any emergency, when hot water was poured on it and thus dissolved it was drunk instead of fresh milk; or carried behind the saddle on a journey, it could be eaten like biscuit.

Now a richer diet prevailed. Over large open fires the carcasses of sheep hung roasting, and around a cauldron which exuded a savoury smell sat a group of hunters who dipped their long forks into the pot, extracted a piece of meat and devoured it from their fingers.

Children ran hither and thither through the camp independently, playing with the animals, collecting horse dung for fuel or quarrelling among themselves for the possession of a discarded whip or arrow.

Yessagai rode to the door of his yurt, where a falconer took his peregrine and a young man sitting on the ground mending harness rose to investigate the trophies of his chase.

"You have had good hunting, oh! Khan?"

"Ay and I shall have better," returned Yessagai. "Come with me, little brother. Hasten! I have seen finer game than this. A woman travels in a khibitka yonder with one old Merkit, who takes her home an unwilling bride."

The youth needed no second bidding. He sprang to his horse and was mounted in a flash.

"Will the man fight for her?" he said, riding at Yessagai's side.

"That we shall see. She is a beauty and she has fired

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

my blood. Hola !” The Khan shouted to a stout man who was skinning a sheep on the outskirts of the encampment. “Leave your work and join us, brother. We ride on an adventure.”

The stout man, whose hands and leathern coat were stained with blood, looked up, but did not immediately move.

“My stomach tells me that it is near the hour of the evening meal,” he shouted back.

“Hear him,” cried Yessagai’s youngest brother, “he thinks of nothing but his food.”

“And you talk as though a healthy appetite were a sin,” said the second brother laughing. “What is this adventure ? If the Khan wants me I am with him.”

He got up, called to his horse which was grazing near and rode towards them.

Yessagai explained his purpose and all three ambled on together.

“It is wrong to lust after another man’s wife,” said the stout one, “but if she be still a maid there can be no harm in taking her.”

“First love is the best love,” answered Yessagai, who already had many wives. “Yet in the midst of summer we look for the spring again. And if Heaven smiles we can recapture the joy of youth.”

He spoke as though tired of domestic felicity and eager for fresh conquest.

“I am not old,” he cried. “I have many years before me. My arms are strong. I desire a woman who is my equal, a fierce she-wolf, whom none but I could tame.”

“No female could be your equal, oh ! Khan,” said the young man in amazement.

“There is a strength of the body, little brother, and a strength of the brain, both good things. There is also a strength of the spirit or so says my anda, Togrul of the

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Keraits. And this spirit I have seen to-day in the eyes of a woman, and seeing it I have known it as the same which before now has turned my bones to water and made my heart faint within me."

The boy's mouth fell open with surprise. But the second brother laughed again.

"I can recall the days when I was small," he said, "and I fled before our mother when she threatened us with a leather strap. It is her look, doubtless, of which the Khan is thinking."

"Nay," answered Yessagai, "though I revere our mother and also the mother of Cousin Katula with the other widows of Uncle Ambagai who dwell with us, these women have no power over me. They have fulfilled their destiny and are concerned with little things. They talk over much and live in the past. The spirit I mean gives itself to the future. It shines from the eyes of a female when she beholds her first born. But, as the son grows to manhood and comes under the control of his father, this light is hidden from him and it is rare for him to live up to its expectation. For the father can only make of him a man, but in the eyes of the mother he is a god."

"But you would not leave a son of yours in the hands of his mother," said the stout man in horror.

"If that were the will of Heaven, and if the mother were such a woman as I have seen to-day, I would go to our ancestors saying that a mightier one than I might follow," replied Yessagai gravely.

They had encircled the point where he had first met the khibitka and now came to the brow of a hill, whence they could see the extent of the valley. The solitary horseman and the cart were still moving beside the river and would presently be below them.

"Shall I shoot an arrow against the rider?" said the young man, unslinging a bow from his back.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

"Nay, hold your hand," said Yessagai. "We can wait."

"They have surely seen us," said the second brother. "Look! The cart has stopped. The Merkit gallops back on his tracks. The woman cannot be of much worth, or he would not so soon desert her."

"He has turned up the opposite hillside," said Yessagai. "Perhaps he desires to reach the forest and find a hiding place."

"Nay, he is coming back," cried the youth. "Now we have him. Shall we ride, oh! Khan?"

"Not yet. He has reached the khibitka. He is speaking to the woman. He is sore afraid. I do not suppose he will stay to fight."

"If he tries to carry her off, we shall overtake them."

"They parley long. There is some problem here."

"Then they have solved it between them. He escapes alone."

"He carries something with him. I saw a flutter of white. Shall we not pursue and take his treasure?"

"He is no man who cannot try to keep such a woman or die fighting," said Yessagai.

"She may prefer your capture to his rescue."

"Hark," said Yessagai. "It sounds not so."

He lifted his hand and the three stayed motionless.

From the khibitka a piercing shriek reached their ears. The abandonment of woe was in that noise. It thrilled the air. The first scream was followed by another and another, voicing an ecstasy of pain and grief as tremendous, as unconscious, as the cries of a woman in labour.

The youngest brother shivered. "This adventure seems scarce worth our while," he muttered.

"Such screams should raise waves on the river and shake trees in the valley," said the second brother, looking over his

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

shoulder as though in expectation of some natural cataclysm. But the blue eyes of Yessagai kindled.

"The woman has great lungs," he said. "Go after the man if you will. I will approach her alone."

The owner of the khibitka was called Yeke Chilaidu. The name of the woman, whom he was taking home as a wife from the tribe of the Olkhonots, was Hoelun. It had been against her advice that they travelled over the territory of Yessagai, on their way to the camping ground of the Merkits.

"These Tartars are hostile to our people," she had said, "and they are very strong. It were better for us to avoid meeting any of them."

"What do you, a female, know of such things?" he had answered. "Am I not your protector?"

And she had held her peace.

But before she had met the eyes of Yessagai she had known fear, and afterwards she had known her fate.

The encounter that had revealed life to her left Yeke Chilaidu vaguely troubled. He was a man of slow decisions, uncertain of himself. When at last he saw the three riders on the crest of the hill, sudden terror gripped him. He thought only of his own safety, and without a word to Hoelun he struck his horse and galloped back to find a hiding place. There was none he could conveniently reach and shame overtook him. He returned to the cart, which Hoelun had brought to a standstill, and found her calm and undismayed.

"Those men yonder are enemies," he said. "Their leader is the one on the white horse, who passed us a while ago. I liked not the look of him then and I like still less the look of his companions."

"Then you should escape," she returned coolly. "You

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

are well mounted. Hurry off, or they will surely kill you."

"I like not to leave you," he answered. "The bullocks move slowly and if I take you behind me, they will catch us."

"Why should you risk death for me, a female?" she answered gently, smiling.

"True," said Yeke, "there are other women to be had for the asking and life is sweet. Yet you would have suited me. Oh! Hoelun, I shall not forget you, but give me some token by which I can avenge your memory."

"I have no jewel nor anything you could keep."

"Then take off your shift and give me that. It will hold the scent of your body. Ah! my bitter loss! Quick, woman, quick, they look this way."

Hoelun stood up in the cart and dropped her quilted coat. Then she drew off her cotton shift, laying bare her beauty, from which he turned his eyes away. When he turned to her again she had covered herself. She handed him the shift saying:

"May this be your comfort. If you survive, find another wife and call her by my name."

"She can never compare with you," cried Yeke despairingly.

Weak tears filled his eyes but did not prevent him from seeing his way. Clutching the shift, he leaned forward in his saddle and galloped off up the river.

Hoelun crouched down in the cart. "And this," she thought, "is a man."

Suddenly a horror of humanity overwhelmed her. She desired none of her own kind. All were rapacious or faithless. She was alone, deserted, defenceless. The empty sky covered her like a tomb. The naked earth waited for the dust of her bones. This was not the beginning but the end of life.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

And her spirit rose against the spectre of death and desolation and she cried aloud.

The brothers of Yessagai pursued Yeke but did not catch him.

Meanwhile Yessagai rode down the hill to the khibitka. When he reached it, he looked down at Hoelun's bowed head and said :

“Why do you grieve, woman ?”

His voice was like the first breath of spring in the forest. Hearing it, her heart seemed to put forth leaves. She lifted her eyes.

“You have seen me before,” said Yessagai.

“Yet you come to me new as the dawn over the hills,” she answered.

“I am a man and your mate,” he said.

“I have never yet beheld your like,” she replied. “You are no man but a god.”

“The sunlight of blue Heaven visited the yurt of Alan Goa,” he said. “The child of that union was my ancestor. Will you go with me and be my wife ?”

“I will go,” said Hoelun.

And he lifted her from the cart and set her on his saddle bow.

The flowers bloomed in the valley, red, blue and yellow amidst the green grass.

In the heart of Hoelun shone a white light which held all the colours.

Some months later, when the Mongols were in their winter quarters, below the hill Dailiun Baldak, which was still covered with snow, Yessagai and his warriors returned from a foray against the Buyur Lake Tartars, with whom they were ever hostile. They brought with them much

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

loot in horses and furs and among their captives was the chieftain Temudjin Uje, noted as a strong man and an able blacksmith. To him they did honour, for he would be held to ransom.

The night was dark when they rode into the camp. A black frost held and the rivers were yet ice bound, though the month was April. The women ran to meet their husbands and the aged mother of Cousin Katula, one of Uncle Ambagai's widows, followed them, calling for Yessagai.

"Here am I, kinswoman," he shouted through the murk and the turmoil. "Where is Hoelun?"

She found him and held his bridle rein.

"Rejoice oh! Khan," she cried, mumbling with toothless gums. "Heaven has favoured you this night. Hoelun is delivered of a son!"

"Is all well?"

"Ay, she looks for your coming, and it is a lusty brat! 'Twas born holding a lump of blood in one fist very firmly, so it should grow to be a warrior."

"Now is my cup full and my heart glad," said the Khan. "I will go to Hoelun! But first hear ye all!" And he roared like a lion in his might to the crowding men around. "A son is born to me, comrades, on this night of good omen. His name shall be called Temudjin, for that means the best steel, and he shall be finely tempered, a sword to strike our enemies and a power in the land."

A mighty shout went up with a clashing of arms and a trampling of hoofs.

"Long life to Yessagai Bahadur! Good luck to Temudjin."

And great laughter at the expense of the luckless Temudjin Uje broke forth, with song and the sound of many voices clamouring for meat and kumiss.

Then Yessagai came to his yurt and went in to Hoelun.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

There was great feasting in the camp that night. Around enormous fires the men sat devouring whole joints of mutton which they cut with their knives from the roasting carcasses of sheep. The heady liquor brewed from millet and honey, which was their winter drink, flowed freely and all were more or less intoxicated.

Daritai, Yessagai's young brother, bawled a song in praise of wine.

Temudjin Uje, as drunk and as cheerful as any, recited an interminable saga about the sons of Alan Goa and their descendants, which proved that he and his captors were akin.

The camels grunted. The weary horses slept. The dogs howled. The rising moon touched the snowy hill tops with a ghostly light. Yessagai, his hawk's face illumined with the red glow of the fire, gloried and drank deep.

Within the yurt, Hoelun lay on a couch of sable skins, somnolent, satisfied.

The infant Temudjin, naked within the shelter of her arm, fought with tiny battering fists and empurpled face for the breast. Having found it, he too gave himself to the feast.

As she watched him, her look was older than man, older than the world.

It was the look of the Mother of Nations.¹

¹ "Later the Mongols called her first Oloun Yéké, 'the great,' and in the end Eugéline éké, the Mother of Nations."—*Cahun*.

CHAPTER II

THIRTEEN years passed. On a hopeful day of Spring, Yessagai said to Hoelun, "Where is Temudjin?"

"I know not," she answered. "He is ever off to the woods alone, but not to hunt. Once at dawn, I found him lying on a hill top, his face to the east. He had been there all night, with no covering but his cloak, and by his look he had not slept, though indeed he can sleep in any place and at any time. He had the air of not belonging to our world."

"He is an idler and will come to no good," said Yessagai, troubled.

"Say not so," she answered. "He is full of dreams and he is different from his two brothers and from his sister Taimulun. He is wilder than any of them, but he is also stronger."

"It is time he left his dreams. He is no longer a child. We must find him a wife to make a man of him."

"There are fair maidens among my own people. My brother has a young daughter."

"If she be like you and the boy has my heart, she should suit. I will ride out with him to the Olkhonot ground."

Yessagai sent men to look for his son. They found young Temudjin standing on a great rock, where the snow still lay. Slight in figure, motionless as a carven image, he did not stir at their approach. But when they called to him, he leapt lightly down and came to the horse he had left, which they had caught and held ready for him.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

In the grace of his body he resembled his mother, in colour his eyes were like those of his father. But the expression of these amazing eyes, in Temudjin's case, was more mysterious and more purposeful than in the case of Yessagai, or any other member of the family. Instead of being wild and clear like the eyes of a beast of prey, they were steadfast and visionary. The deep blue of the iris seemed alternately to be clouded by the smoke of an inward smouldering fire, or lit to purple by a sudden blaze of red. His countenance was round and comely, but not vivacious. His rather full, unsmiling lips could never show meanness or lust. All his movements were quick, unstudied and beautiful, suggesting complete control. There was a radiance of vitality and health about him, like the vivid colours of living fur and feather. His serene gravity was that of Truth, ageless, innocent and all knowing. It was as though, on the border of manhood, he had caught and kept as a possession all the loveliness of childhood, and would discard nothing but its limitations.

Man's adolescence is nearly always shadowed by the prevision of failure. Birds and beasts enter on their full power without this dimming of their splendour, although they pass through the age of awkward limbs and changing dress. So Temudjin, despite his grace, was more like one of them than any human. His spirit was free, poised as though for flight. His growth of mind and body followed the rhythm of the law.

Better mounted than his father's men and more at one with his horse than any, he rode ahead and did not draw rein till he reached the yurt.

"Well, son, have you been after game?" said Yessagai, critical, puzzled.

"Nay, I have been at school."

"How say you—at school?"

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

The Mongol language having no alphabet, Yessagai knew nothing of education beyond the practice of living.

"He has that word school from a man who came among us from the Naiman tribe," explained Hoelun. "The Prince Yelui Tashi of Kara Khitai, that great conqueror, may have brought from his people the Khitans¹ a method of making pictures on paper as a means of communication."

"And the Naimans have learned this process?"

"Perhaps. Yului's grandson, Chiluku, reigns in Kara Khitai now, but they say he is threatened by the Khan of the Naimans, Kushluk, the strong man, who has made an alliance with his brother and your anda, Togrul of the Keraites."

"I know that," said Yessagai frowning. "Togrul ever seeks his own advantage. He must have got this picture making from Kara Khitai and given it to Kushluk."

"Nay," said Temudjin. "The Naiman who came here said that his people were taught by the Uigurs, who make no pictures, but have learned a method of certain wise men, who are named Nestorians. In their yurts, the Uigurs gather the young folk together and call it a school. Then they teach them to make the Nestorian signs on paper and this they call writing."

"It is folly," said Yessagai. "What use can it be to their young men? How can it make them strong in battle or in sport?"

"Some day I shall learn it," said Temudjin. "It is a new thing and therefore it may be a power."

"Have you already begun then, with your talk of being at school?"

"I have begun to think of the future, but I have not begun to learn this writing."

¹ The Khitans were the Chinese from Khitai, Cathay. The territory in the West of Asia won by the Chinese Conqueror Yelui Tashi was called Kara Khitai or Black China and is described later. See Chap. V.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

"You give yourself overmuch to dreams."

"They are no dreams," said Temudjin, and his blue eyes darkened. "I see the earth at my feet waiting to be trodden. I see the sky bending to the far horizon and inviting me by its space to place that horizon further. I see ants running about on the ground, content with a little territory that is great to them, and I see men doing no more than ants. But the wind that sweeps across the plain and never stops, and the light that sweeps across the sky and penetrates every corner of the earth show me what man might do. For what are we but creatures of air and heat, and what is our energy if it be not the same force?"

"You are young," said Yessagai, smiling doubtfully. "You look for new conquests."

"I look for the dominion of the world," said the boy calmly. "Petty strife should cease. We Mongols should be all one people, not divided against each other. What do we gain by our forays? A few more horses, a few miles of pasture, a new excuse for drinking much wine. The earth is wide. There are many peoples in it and great riches. There are things we have never seen, sounds we have never heard. Heaven would not have given us our senses, if we were not meant to satisfy them."

"Hear him," laughed Yessagai. "'Tis hot blood speaking. Come, seek a wife, boy, and you will find all the experience you want."

Temudjin, cool, unsmiling, self-possessed, did not question his father's advice.

But Hoelun looked strangely at her son.

Yessagai and Temudjin rode forth with ten men towards the land of the Olkhonots, a journey of many days. They carried with them small folding yurts and a supply of dried milk. For meat they would depend on the chase, and

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

their horses, accustomed to eat anything that grew, would not want for fodder.

The men were dressed roughly in leather and the skins of beasts. Close fitting caps of felt or hide covered their heads and ears, and they were armed with spears, bows and arrows.

"If we were at the head of many tens like this, what could stop our advance?" said Temudjin. "We should be like a river in spate, cleaving a way between the mountains."

"Yet we should at last find some sea in which we should be lost," said Yessagai.

"Who knows?" answered Temudjin. "Men under a leader are not unstable like water. There is a power that can knit them together into a solid substance. Who knows where this power might carry them? Heaven alone knows."

They rode on in silence. Presently the boy said, "I have heard there are men who live in dwellings built of stone."

"Those would be poor dwellings, son. They could not be moved and they would be very cold."

"They could be warmed with fires and the stone walls would keep out the wind. So there would be no need to move them. An uluss of such buildings, encircled by a rampart, would be very strong."

"The black camp of the Uigurs has a rampart of earth all round it."

Yessagai used the Mongol words Kara (black) and Kuren (camp), thus designating the place which his grandson was to establish as a capital city, under the name of Karakorum.

"Earth crumbles to dust in time," said Temudjin. "Walls made of sun-dried bricks would be better, so they were thick enough."

"Ay, no man could ever hope to pass a wall like that which bounds the land of the Kins."¹

¹ The Kin dynasty of China.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

"If the will be mighty enough, no wall can stand against it."

"You know not what you say."

"I have no wisdom but yours, oh ! my father."

"You have the spirit of your mother, son, and it will carry you far. Say what it tells you."

A light of inspiration kindled in the boy's eyes.

"The mountains speak to me with a voice, and beyond them I seem to hear other voices calling, the voices of great walls. They lament, knowing I shall reach them, and they acclaim me as their conqueror to be. To others they are grim and silent and dark. To me they are an invitation and a way. With their dangers they will prove my strength, and when I have gone they will stand as a testimony to my power."

"Truly will they," laughed Yessagai, "since none but you have ever called barriers 'a way.'"

They came to a wild and desolate gorge, between two wooded hills that seemed to frown on them from beetling brows. The scene was strange, dark and fantastic as a dream. The rocky path edged the declivity of some old watercourse, where giant boulders lay strewn. Hazel and willow were in bud and oak saplings showed a flush of red, but the great tree trunks stood gloomy, brooding, as though they did not believe in the promise of spring.

There came riding towards them a man, who sang in a strong voice a chant that had the plaintive note of all wild melodies :

"A white bird perched upon my wrist,
Holding the white moon and the yellow sun ;
Great glory shone on me and all around,
But my white bird will fly away."

"Hold," said Yessagai, drawing rein. "We will have speech with this warbler."

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

The oncoming rider stopped and saluted them.

He was a hardy fellow, grizzled and rough as some lichened stone, spare of body, and whimsical of expression.

"Who are you?" questioned Yessagai.

"A Mongol of the Kungrads, oh! Khan! My people are warriors in the service of the Kin and guard a portion of the Wall. My name is Dai-setsen."

"Good luck to you, Dai-setsen. We go on a quest to seek a bride for my son here from his uncles."

The old soldier looked long at Temudjin. "Your son has the face of a man," he said. "May he be happy."

"You were singing of a bird," said Temudjin. "What did your song mean?"

"I sang of a dream that I had last night," answered Dai-setsen, with a melancholy smile. "A white falcon, carrying the sun and the moon in its talons, flew down to my wrist and perched upon it."

"That should be an omen of greatness," said Yessagai.

"Ay, truly, for I know nothing of the lights of heaven except what my eyes show me. But now these lights are within me and I see clearly. My dream foretold this meeting with you, oh! Khan."

"How make you that?"

"I have a daughter at home. She is young. A bird barely fledged—but there is none like her. Come but a little way out of your road and you shall see her."

"You look for high fortune, indeed," laughed Yessagai. "What say you, son? Shall we go look on this rare fledgling?"

"Standing between the sun and the moon, her feathers will be of gold and her plumage of silver," said Temudjin gravely. "A man would need such wings to carry him over high walls."

"Then lead on, Dai-setsen," said Yessagai.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

The boy drew alongside the veteran and they rode together, talking. Yessagai and his men followed.

At the end of the gorge, the rocky path wound upwards into the woods. Here in a spacious clearing, stood the yurts of the Kungrads.

Dai-setsen took them to his own dwelling and set meat and drink before them.

They were served by smiling women and Dai-setsen asked for his daughter, but they told him that she was out playing in the woods.

Temudjin left his food and wandered off among the trees.

"If the girl pleases you, oh ! Khan," said Dai-setsen, drawing near Yessagai with a sly look, "shall I yield her to your son only after much begging, or will you honour her less if I give her in answer to few words ?"

Though Temudjin worshipped the sun, as the author and giver of good life, he loved also the dark shade of the forest. Here he was enfolded by the mysterious atmosphere of the taiga, as the Mongols call the unknown, and the wilderness claimed him for its own.

Unlike his kind, who are only at home on horseback, he liked to go on foot through such places and went loping swiftly and silently along, like a young wolf.

The forest was full of dead timber, obstructing progress with torn up roots of fantastic shape. Over these he climbed or leapt. The stillness did not oppress him. He felt an affinity with the strong choking undergrowth. His blood surged in his veins, as the sap flowed up through the branches of birch and poplar. The trees were his brothers, clean limbed and questing as himself ; the budding leaves were his little sisters, full of hope and promise. Alone, he knew himself in the company of many friends.

"Come, oh ! Temudjin," they called to him. "We

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

have secrets to tell you. Listen Temudjin, for you are one of us, mortal as we are and yet immortal. God is in the gloom as in the light. Lose yourself and you shall surely find Him here. Awful and omnipotent He reigns, but you who know not fear may look on His face. Merciless He moves in our midst like a shadow, and the earth you tread is Bogdo" (holy ground).

At the edge of a green swamp, the boy stopped and communed with the silence. Its strength flowed in on him with no suggestion of peace, but with a fierce uplifting of the will and an urge towards endeavour. He flung his arms above his head and laughed aloud in the ecstasy of realisation, and his laughter was round and full like a summer cloud. The sound startled a coney out of the brushwood and it ran before him over the moss. After it went Temudjin, light foot, rejoicing in movement. Wet branches stung his face, roots caught at his feet. With rough embraces, his friends detained him.

He came out at last into a grassy glade, starred with the first primroses. All the innocence and rapture of youth were there. No shadow, but a tender green effulgence ruled. The pale flowers were like a strain of high thin music in a minor key. The vivid tassels of larch trees formed an archway as of fretted jade, delicate, cold and pure. Temudjin fell to his knees and bent his head.

"This is Truth," he said. "God, I adore Thee."

When he looked up, he became aware of another human. A little girl stepped into the glade at the further end, and paused, with finger at her lips, staring at him. Her age could not have been more than ten years, and she looked like some fairy princess out of a tale told to children. Above high boots of scarlet leather, she wore a short black kilted skirt, heavily embroidered at the edge with tiny squares or silk in vegetable dyes of green, petunia, orange and blue.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Her loose coat, lined with squirrel fur, was of plum coloured Chinese brocade and her black hair, hanging in two thick well greased plaits, was uncovered. Her face was like a blossom, round, cool and tender, and her slanting eyes, with their daintily pencilled brows, were soft and deep. She was vivid as the personification of romance, charming as a poem in praise of Spring, rare and fine as a pearl.

Seeing her, Temudjin could not move, fearing she should vanish. Then her mouth and eyes crinkled to a smile. "Hola, boy!" she called.

Still he could not stir or speak. She came towards him, swinging her gay skirt, and dropped crouching by a clump of primroses.

"Whence come you?" she said.

"Tell me first of yourself," answered Temudjin.

"I am called Bortai, daughter of Dai-sensen."

"Then I have heard of you."

"Do you know my father?"

"I met him in the way. My father sits with him now in his yurt, talking of you."

"Such talk would be no concern of yours."

"I came into the woods seeking a bird."

"Have you found it?"

"Ay!"

"Did you kill it?"

"Nay."

"Show it to me, oh! boy! Is it still on the branch of some tree?"

"Its nest is on the ground."

"Then we can surely find it again." She jumped up and held out her hand to him.

"Come, boy! I know the forest well."

Temudjin rose and stood looking down on her. "You are the bird of Heaven," he said. "Teach me the use of wings."

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

She laughed. "In the morning, they carry us upwards. At midday, they support us as we swoop, and on their strength we travel far. In the evening, they are our shelter and our repose."

Temudjin slipped his hand into hers.

"Tell me more, Bortai, for you are very wise."

They went through the glade, boy and girl together, hand in hand.

When they returned to the camp, Dai-setsen was saying to Yessagai, "It is true that a girl is not born to remain with her father for ever, yet"

"My son appears to have found your daughter," said Yessagai, "and by their look they are well pleased with one another."

The little girl ran to them and sat beside Dai-setsen, who put his arm round her. Temudjin followed and lay down on the grass, supporting his face in his hands and gazing at Bortai as at some newly discovered jewel. Yessagai smiled.

"She is a fair maid. My heart rejoices at the sight of her."

Like all Mongols he loved children. His hawk's face lightened, and he joined the fond father in playing with Bortai, while Temudjin gravely watched them.

Next day, having stayed in that place for the night, the Khan made the expected proposal on Temudjin's behalf. After some show of reluctance, Dai-setsen yielded, with the proviso that the boy should be left with him for a time. Temudjin was eager for this arrangement, and his father was not loth that he should become better acquainted with his future bride.

With simple ceremony the agreement was concluded, and Yessagai rode away without his son, wondering what Hoelun

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

would say. Through all the years they had lived together, she had remained his first and favourite wife, a helpmeet and comrade above all the other women, to whom she was an object of jealousy.

"The way of fate is past understanding," thought Yessagai, remembering how he had met his love, "but Hoelun will rejoice that the boy should be well mated." In his mind stirred a recollection of Temudjin's strange speech regarding walls. The Kungrads guarded a portion of that mighty barrier which bordered the Kin Empire, the land of ancient enemies. To what far end might an alliance with this tribe lead?

On the way home, Yessagai stopped at a place called Cheksar, where some Tartars had their yurts. These were of the tribe against which he had once been hostile, but since he had established supremacy over them, since also they seemed willing for friendship, he was ready to forget the past. They rode to meet him, crowding round him and his men with loud expressions of welcome.

"Fortune favours us, oh! Khan, in bringing you this way! We will prepare a yurt for you and a great feast! Only stay with us this night and test our lealty to you!"

Yessagai's men were inclined to surliness, particularly one warrior among them, his cousin Munlik, who had ridden in the foray against Temudjin Uje, had captured that chieftain himself and had subsequently been deputed to kill the captive, when his ransom was not paid. But the Khan was tired and hungry. The thought of comfortable shelter, fresh meat and kumiss appealed to him and he was in no mood for caution.

The Tartars took him into a large yurt and gave him the place of honour, belonging to the master, opposite the door and beneath the principal felt image, which signified the law of earth. Then they brought liquor in a lordly bowl

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

and while one man shouted "Ha!" in a loud voice, the others beat time to the musicians, who began to play on barbaric instruments. Yessagai followed the prescribed custom of pouring part of his wine on the ground in a libation, and drained the remainder at a draught.

More kumiss was sprinkled on the images in order of their importance, after which a servant went out of the yurt with a brimming cup, the contents of which he threw three times towards the south with bowed knees in honour of the fire. Again he enacted the same ceremony towards the east in honour of the air, again towards the west in honour of water and lastly towards the north in honour of the dead.

Half the hours of the night passed thus in commemorating the joyful occasion and in enlivening it with song and story.

Then Yessagai sought repose, but did not find it. Before the dawn had touched the eastern hills, he arose, vaguely troubled with thoughts of Hoelun, impatient to see her again.

He called his men and they rode away without taking leave of their hosts.

The morning broke and suddenly Yessagai reeled in his saddle. Munlik caught his arm and supported him.

"I am sick," muttered Yessagai. "There was a slow acting poison in that bowl."

"Dismount and rest here, oh! Khan. We will go back and slay the traitors."

"Nay, do not leave me. I am like a cart with a broken axle and must needs reach home. . . . Why should they have sought my life? They spoke fair words."

"They remember Temudjin Uje and would avenge him. Two of us could return and kill them all."

"Talk not of death. I shall recover and outwit them."

They rode on and Yessagai's thoughts were with Hoelun,

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

but half his heart harked back to Temudjin, the boy at play with Bortai.

For three days they rode, and the Khan's sickness increased so that when they came home at last, he fell, fainting, from his horse.

They carried him into his yurt, and presently he spoke from the darkness that encompassed him.

"Where am I? Who is with me?"

Hoelun laid her hand in his and he held it, but Munlik spoke.

"I am here, Bahadur, and my heart is sore for you."

"It is Munlik speaking. Munlik, I have a charge to give you. The end is upon me. When I am gone, look to Hoelun and tell my brothers and their wives what has happened."

"It shall be done, Bahadur."

"But first—ah! I am in pain! The poison grips me. . . Quick, Munlik, mount and ride back to my son. Bring the boy Temudjin here quickly."

Munlik went off in haste and hardly drew rein till he reached the dwelling of Dai-setsen. He delivered his message and Temudjin parted from his friends.

"Return to us," said Dai-setsen, "after you have seen your father."

"Return to us," said little Bortai. "I shall never forget you, oh! my play fellow."

"I will return," said Temudjin, "for I love you."

They galloped through the day and through the night.

But faster than they could go flew an invisible Rider, who came before them to the yurt. Very early in the morning He went in to Yessagai like a cold wind and stood beside his couch.

"Is it you, my son?"

"Nay, Bahadur, it is not Temudjin."

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

“ I know thee, oh ! thou Dark One. Wait a little, that I may see the boy.”

“ I wait for no man, Bahadur.”

“ Truly thou art mightier than I and I must yield to thee.”

So died Yessagai, father of Temudjin, in the year 1175.

CHAPTER III

ALONE and still and sick at heart sat Hoelun, within the shelter of her yurt.

Cold fear stood at her elbow and hatred encompassed her round about. She knew herself bereft of love and power, and she could find no tears to wash away her trouble.

Outside the women who had hardly cared for Yessagai, the women for whom Yessagai had cared so little, wailed and shrieked.

The preparations for the funeral obsequies of the Khan went forward. In a place hollowed out of the side of the hill, a new tent had been erected and there they had laid his body on a wooden couch, beside which stood a table that would be spread with delicate food of burnt offerings. A black bull would be sacrificed, and later Yessagai's white stallion, saddled and richly caparisoned, would be driven into the tent and the flap closed. Then many men would work with spades to cover the abode of death, not heeding any sound of trampling hoofs or terrified neighings or the one last fearful scream of a horse buried alive. And in the years to come no one would distinguish the place.

For this reason, any tumulus that might be the work of man or nature was considered holy ground. When they were supposed to be the sepulchres of the great, they were marked with monoliths set round the base or with crudely carved figures of stone, facing towards the east and holding drinking cups or snuff bottles at middle height. Near by

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

also there would be a rough shrine, or obo, dedicated to Heaven, containing offerings of food and decorated with votive rags.

When the tumuli were considered the work of Nature, they were used as tribal meeting places. But as Nature was the object of their worship, the obo would find a place here as well, and sometimes even the giant statues of ancestors would be erected to give further dignity to the assembly. The monoliths, the figures, or the obos could therefore never indicate without doubt a grave.

These tall blocks of granite, these statues, gazing ever eastward with their sightless eyes and forever holding in their hands objects of ceremony, these shrines empty of everything but the tokens of sacrifice, all stood for a pantheistic faith founded on fear. The monoliths were the pillars of a temple, roofed by the wide sky, the figures were its silent guardians, against who knows what powers of darkness, the obos were its altars, visited surely by spirits invested by man with human needs. It was the worship of Pan and its name was Shamanism. Its practises were lit with magic and darkened with witchcraft. Heaven spoke to its priests and people in anger with the dread voice of thunder, or smiled upon them in the sunshine. Earth, to whose familiar spirits they gave form within their yurts, might more easily be propitiated by perpetual attention.

After the burial of Yessagai, they held a great feast in his honour and mourned him for many days. The time was near when they would leave the winter camping ground and move to the summer hills.

"But the woman Hoelun shall not go with us," said the old widow of Uncle Ambagai.

"We want neither her nor any of her brats," agreed the other jealous females.

"She laid a spell upon the Khan many years ago, since

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

when he never looked our way nor thought of anyone else."

"By rights she should have gone with him to his last rest, for a man needs his favourite wife as well as his favourite horse."

"She would never have agreed to that, and we did not want an unwilling victim."

"Also we should have had to reckon with her son. He is a devil that one."

"Ay! We do not want Temudjin any more than Hoelun."

"We will leave them here, alone, and take Targutai Kurultuk for our leader."

"He is a strong man. Will the tribe follow him?"

"He and his brother, Todoyan Jirisha, have been playing for power this long while. The people are in their hands but we hold the reins. Men are governed by women."

The funeral mound was made, a statue of Yessagai erected, new monoliths set in place and an obo built on the summit. Around the tumulus the funeral feast was laid. Hoelun, carrying her infant daughter Taimulun and supported by young Temudjin, came out of her yurt and was joined by her other sons, Juchi-Kassar and little Udjughen, and by a few who remained faithful to her.

Her stepsons Baiktar and Belguai, loving Yessagai more than their own mother, advanced to meet her, and with them stood Munlik and his father Charaha, a wise and ancient man. But the great concourse of people did not move or speak, neither would they make way for the little family.

"Tell them," said Temudjin in a loud voice, "that Hoelun, the beloved of my father, comes for her share of the sacrificial meats."

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Munlik, eager to fulfil Yessagai's last command, would have gone but old Charaha stopped him.

"Young blood is hot blood," he said. "Better that I should go and reason with them." And he went forward to deliver the message to Targutai. They saw him at the centre of an excited group, expostulating, arguing.

"They do not want us," said Hoelun, pale as death. "They deny us their fellowship and wish to shut us out from the ruling circle."

The infant set up a fretful cry.

"We are lost," said Baiktar. "What can we do against so many?"

"Nothing is lost while we live," said Temudjin.

"Charaha returns," said Kassar. "His peace making is vain."

"Vain indeed," said Munlik. "They threaten him with lifted arms and angry voices. Oh! my father," and he hastened towards the old man.

But, before he could reach him, a coward's spear was thrust into Charaha's back and the peacemaker fell to the ground. Temudjin rushed forward and helped Munlik to raise him. They carried him into the yurt and, while the others stood on guard outside, found that he was mortally wounded. He could, however, still speak.

"Oh! valourous and venerable one—tell me, if you can, what has happened," cried Temudjin. "Give me your advice before you go, for I am young and desolate."

"I had speech with Targutai and also with his brother Todoyan," said the old man with difficulty. "They are proud men and very obdurate. They have enticed away your people and our relations with fair promises. Thus spoke they to me. 'The deep water is gone, the bright stone is broken. We cannot restore them. We have nothing to do with that woman and her children.'"

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

"And these are they whom my father made great in the land," said Temudjin bitterly. "Thankless and faithless, sons of dogs, may they be dispersed like dust—may they rot for ever!"

"Heaven will judge them," whispered Charaha. "Give me your hand, boy. Though you are young, I acknowledge you my Khan. In life I served your father. You I serve in death. Look to your . . ."

A gush of blood to the mouth stopped his words. He choked and spoke no more.

Munlik, kneeling at the foot of the couch, groaned and hid his face. But presently he looked up.

"My father is dead," he said, "on your account, and his last thought was not for me but for you. Accursed be you, Temudjin, who have robbed me of my father's blessing."

Temudjin withdrew his hand from the old hand of Charaha and stood upright.

"I also missed my father's blessing, oh! Munlik," he said in a still voice and went out from the tent.

He was driven by a great despair. Tragedy following on tragedy overwhelmed him. First he had lost the one whom he loved and revered above all others, now he had lost this faithful councillor, who might have been to him a second father. To whom could he look? What person had been in Charaha's mind when death had filled Charaha's mouth?

Hoelun sat on the ground, rocking the infant in her arms. Her aspect was that of some eternal power, protective and strong. She no longer thought of herself but of her children. Seeing her thus, Temudjin's heart melted.

"Mother!" he said.

She turned her head towards him. He fell on his knees beside her, put his head on her shoulder and wept. He was only a human boy after all.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

"They may desert us," said Hoelun. "They will not desert the standard which we still hold, the standard of our ancestors."

She indicated the ancient banner on a wooden pole, planted in front of the yurt. It bore a rough delineation of four wolves rampant, and from the carved wolf's head surmounting the pole hung pendant nine white yak tails, symbolical of the nine original tribes of the Northern Shi wei, from which the Mongols were descended.

The wolf, that significant beast, which still stands for brigandage in Central Asia, was the founder of the Mongol as of the Roman Empire. Predatory, wild, but before all the carnivorous as distinct from the herbivorous animal, the wolf was identified by Ssanang Setsen, the royal historian, with Burtechino, the flesh eater, youngest son of the Khan of Tibet. But the doubtful myth which traced Mongol descent from early Hindostan through Tibet was actually due to the Lamas, who wished to flatter the Imperial house when their religion was adopted.

"We will raise the standard," cried Hoelun, "and we will follow our people."

The summer migration had already begun. Herds, flocks and families streamed by on their way to the uplands.

The women, who were responsible for this desertion, were mounted astride like the men. The matrons wore hoods, bound round their waists and breasts with scarves of sky blue wool, and below their eyes masks or veils of white silk hung down to their breasts. Their headgear was surmounted by the Botta, an ornament that signified wealth and distinction in male and female alike, and its upstanding quills gave them in the distance, viewed from the rear, the aspect of a company of warriors, carrying their lances in rest.

A few men had shamefacedly deserted the main course and elected to stay with Hoelun. She, full of stern

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

resolve, made her own preparations for departure. The royal yurt had been removed, but she had hidden the standard under a covering of felt.

Now she gave instructions that the small remaining tents should be packed, she found lances for her servants and horses for herself and her sons, and placed Taimulun with a nurse in a covered khibitka.

When all was ready and the vast throng of people and animals were receding in the distance, she produced the standard and gave it to Temudjin to carry, and mounting, rode beside him at the head of her little cavalcade.

Their progress was slow, the pace set by the bullocks, whose precious burden they dared not leave, and the horses left to them, being the worst and oldest of the herds. But at last, necessity forbidding delay, they overtook the rear-guard of the retreating mass. Then Hoelun and Temudjin galloped along the ranks, shouting and appealing to their subjects.

"Shame on you," shrieked the woman. "Would you turn your backs on the symbol of the royal house? Have you so soon forgotten Yessagai Bahadur and his power? Would you be like sheep without a shepherd and like a rabble without a leader?"

"I bring you the standard which none shall take from me," cried Temudjin, and the breeze of his movement fluttered the yak tails around his head. "Oh! my people, stay and listen to me. I will be your Khan and your commander!"

The words passed from mouth to mouth. Something stronger than their own will held half the people. While the head of the great procession moved on, heedless and deaf, some thousands wavered, paused and stopped. They held a conclave there in the midst of the plain. Their oldest and wisest men came to talk with Hoelun and Temudjin.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

But close on their heels came the women, whose hatred was still strong. Like mounted warriors, the angry women assembled and filled the air with protesting screams.

"You see how it is with us," said a troubled grey-beard. "There can be no peace in a family divided against itself, and unless we are at peace with each other how can we prosper?"

"I would put all these screeching owls to the sword," said Temudjin fiercely.

"And their brothers and sons would fall on you and yours in revenge. Your strength is small, your followers few. For the sake of the greater number, it is best that we should leave you."

"Then you would have me as an enemy rather than as a friend?"

The grey-beard spread out his hands. "Already half the tribe have gone on with Targutai and Todoyan. We shall find other leaders, grown men whom we can trust. Women and children are a source of much trouble. Where many proclaim their will against one who has no power to enforce herself, there is no choice."

The wise men rode away. The females laughed in triumph and followed them. Hoelun sat like a frozen figure and watched them go.

But Temudjin stood with the standard grasped in his right hand, and his look was undismayed.

They pitched their poor tents on the bank of the river Onon near that place. Their horses were weary, they were without resources and they could go no further. From a position of authority, they had been hurled to misery. None were so destitute as they in all the land. For food they had no sheep and only one old milch cow with her calf. The two bullocks had to be kept for transport until

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

starvation forced them to be killed. They had scarcely any weapons for the chase—two bows and a few precious arrows and some lances that would be of more use in warfare. But Hoelun rose to the emergency.

"We must learn to trap game," she said to her sons. "There are marmots and hares hereabouts, and we shall need their flesh to eat and their fur to renew our clothing. Temudjin will see to this. You, Kassar, must practice your shooting—already you have some skill with the bow. You, Udjughen, must become a fisherman."

"How can I fish," said Udjughen, "without hooks or tackle?"

"I will unravel the yarn of my cloak to twist a cord for lines, and I will give you needles to bend into hooks. You must catch minnows with your hands and use them as bait for bigger fish, with which the water teems."

At first it seemed to the younger boys like an adventure. Ten year old Juchi-Kassar strutted bravely with his bow, and felt himself a man. Little Udjughen, gay of soul, went laughing along the river with Baiktar and Belgutai, who would help him to make their inadequate fishing tackle.

But Temudjin, who expected so much of life, did not smile as he arranged snares and traps for the small game. He envied their freedom and found no joy in betraying his small friends of the wild. Every bird that came to his net, bright-eyed and fluttering, every rabbit he caught, so soft and yet so strong, reminded him of Bortai, the play fellow whom he had lost, the bride he still desired.

And, as the harshness of bare existence became day by day more evident, as healthy appetites, accustomed to a diet of mutton and curd, refused to be satisfied with fare of prairie rats and water, the whole family were reduced to desperate straits, in which they quarrelled among themselves for the scanty food.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

While the brief summer lasted, conditions were not so difficult, though the children often cried themselves to sleep with hunger and Hoelun wrapped herself in ragged felt and sat brooding through the night. But she knew and Temudjin knew that winter would come upon them with ice and snow, when no more fish could be caught and animals would be scarce and shy. Then what would happen? Death, which had held off for an interval, would only strike more surely.

One August evening a thunderstorm was imminent. All Mongols are terrified on such occasions and, well warned by the climatic conditions, they retire to their yurts and, covering their heads with felt, lie hidden till the horror is past. When his family had thus taken refuge, however, Temudjin crept out alone from the camp and went up to a hill top. He was determined to test his strength against the fury of Heaven. The air was close and heavy. Great rainbow tinted clouds hung in the sky and diffused a light that blanched the face of the earth. Every living thing waited, in a state of breathless expectancy, for the renewal of electric energy.

The boy, pale, tense, devitalised as his surroundings, shuddered and lifted his widespread arms above his head.

A moment later the first large raindrops fell, to the accompaniment of a blinding flash and a shattering roar. Trees bowed their heads and the land seemed to crouch beneath the chastising blow of its salvation. Only the one slight human figure still stood erect, rigid and unafraid.

"God Whom I worship," he cried, "give me strength and power!"

And the rain came down, not as it does in milder climates, pouring straight rods, but with all the fury and mystery of the East. In dense, impenetrable sheets of water it came, like a rushing flood, lit by the terror of

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

blazing lights, urged by the roar of devastating explosions. It wrapped the hills and plains in a liquid mantle. In that darkness the world seemed as it was in the beginning, without form and void.

No common soul could have contemplated the storm. It must have fled from the body enfolding it, it must have shrunk away, desiring a hiding-place in the bowels of the earth. But Temudjin, hurled to the ground, clinging with deep-dug fingers to tussocks of grass, lifted his drowning head to the invisible sky and still breathed his prayer.

“God—let me hear Thy voice and see Thy glory ! God, reveal Thyself to me that I may love Thee more and walk in Thy way. Grant me mastery over my fellows, oh ! God, grant me dominion and majesty in this Thy world ! As Thou givest wisdom to the bee that she may construct her honeycomb, as Thou givest sense to the bird that she may weave her nest, so inspire me that I may build an empire that shall endure for longer than a season. Least of all Thy creatures am I oh ! God. Yet Thou hast made man to be great and I would fulfill Thy will !”

The storm drenched and bruised him, flattened him against the earth, spurned him, trampled him as though with the flying hoofs of a million horses. There was an age-long moment which he felt was the end. His will reeled. His flesh said, “I am done.”

Then he knew a lightness in all his being. His spirit soared until it rode the storm. In its hand it carried the thunderbolt and out of its mouth the lightning proceeded like a song. And the fury of the elements was its own fury, and their voices uttered its law.

“Praise and honour and glory be to Thee, oh ! God, Who makest the earth green and delightest in the fulness thereof. We, Thy children, worship Thee for ever and ever ! We abide only for a time, but Thou art eternal !

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Thy name is Life and Thy mysteries are very deep. Great art Thou, oh God, Who hast set Thy seal on Temudjin that he may be mightier than other men ! ”

So the soul rejoiced in company with the flying creatures of wind and water.

But the body of Temudjin lay prone. And as the storm passed, the body stirred, curled itself round and fell asleep on the sodden turf.

When he came down from the hill a few hours later, he met Baiktar and Belgutai going out to fish. With them was Juchi-Kassar, for Udjughen the youngest boy was with their mother, and Kassar took his place when the fulness of the river promised good sport.

He ran to Temudjin and said, “ Come with me, brother. The others are in a surly mood and do not want me, but you know I am as strong as they, although they are older.”

Then Temudjin went along with them and took a line and fished beside Kassar, while his two half-brothers stayed together. They baited their needle hooks with a fresh minnow that would gleam silver white in the muddy water, and Temudjin waded out till he stood waist deep in the stream and cast his line wide across a rapid. At once it was nearly wrenched from his hand, with a strong pull.

“ A bite, a bite,” cried Kassar, dancing with excitement on the bank. “ You have a big one surely. Play him well, brother.”

Temudjin had his spare line wound into a loop. Deftly he let it go as the hooked fish rushed downstream and took it out. Then came the moment for gathering it in again with infinite caution. One mistake in judgment, should he be a little less quick than the fish, and the slender line would be broken.

But Temudjin made no mistakes then or hereafter.



A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

For half an hour he pitted his strength and his cunning against the greatest strength and cunning of the wild. Then, with a triumphant shout to Kassar, he approached the bank, drawing the line steadily and surely upstream. The younger boy plunged into the river, bending forward, groping with eager hands. Somehow between them they landed the fish, a beauty—golden brown in colour, marked with dark spots—a trout weighing at least two pounds. They knocked the gasping head against a stone to still the struggle, and gazed at their catch with shining eyes and all the pride of fishermen.

“It was a marvel that the line held,” said Juchi-Kassar.

“This was a sign that it could not break while it was in my hands,” said Temudjin. Baiktar and Belgutai approached them.

“Well,” said one, “that is not a bad fish for youngsters.”

“Give it to me,” said the other. “It will be a dainty morsel for my supper.”

“It is not your fish,” said Juchi-Kassar angrily.

“I shall take it,” said Baiktar, “for I am bigger than you. Therefore it is my right.”

“Your age gives you no rights,” said Temudjin. “The catch is mine, but even were it not so, the river and all that is in it belongs to me. I am Khan here and you must obey me.”

Belgutai laughed scornfully. “Who made you Khan, stripling. Not our father, for you were not near him when he died.”

“It is the will of Heaven that I should rule !”

“You lie, fool,” said Baiktar. “You are but a child !”

“No man shall speak to me thus and live,” said Temudjin, very pale.

Baiktar knocked Kassar down and took the fish, while Belgutai held Temudjin.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

"Your strength is a little thing," said Temudjin, not struggling. "It will avail you not at all in the end."

The two elder boys went off and Juchi-Kassar sobbed with rage.

"Why did you not fight them, brother! Together we might have vanquished them. It is a shame."

"They shall not escape punishment," said Temudjin coldly, "for they have defied the Mightiest, Whose instrument I am."

"Let us go to our mother," said Kassar. "She will see that justice is done."

Together they returned to the camp, where they found Hoelun in the midst of her servants, preoccupied with drying felt cloths in the evening sun. They drew her into a yurt and told their story.

"This is the second time that Baiktar has behaved thus," said Temudjin. "The other day he took from me a bird that I had snared and ate it himself. Since then, I know that in wronging me, he acts against Heaven, which has ordained me Khan!"

"That may be true," answered Hoelun, "for your father would have wished it. But it is folly to talk so at this time. You have no power to assert your authority. We are without friends or followers. Instead of quarrelling among ourselves, we should combine against our natural enemies. There are enough of these, in good sooth—hunger and cold and rain."

"I will surely stand with Temudjin, my own brother," said Juchi-Kassar. "But what are Baiktar and Belgutai to us? Do you love these sons of another woman more than your own sons?"

"Peace, peace," cried Hoelun distracted. "You are nought but a silly child and Temudjin, who should know better, is puffed up with pride."

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

"Nay," said Temudjin, "my heart is not swollen without just cause. Will you not believe and take my part, oh ! my mother ?"

"I will not be dragged into your broils. Settle them between you, like wise and honest lads."

"This matter is beyond the understanding of a woman," said Temudjin. "Come, Kassar."

And they went out from the yurt, Kassar speechless with passion, slamming the door flap behind him. Together they hastened a little way from the camp. Then Temudjin stopped and laid his hand on Kassar's shoulder.

"You heard what our mother said. Are you of her mind?"

"There can be no peace between us and Belgutai and Baiktat."

"Would you continue to live with them ?"

"I might forgive Belgutai. I will never forgive Baiktat, who called you fool, and threw me to the ground and took your fish."

"Then put your hands between my hands, brother, and say these words : 'I, Juchi-Kassar, acknowledge you, Temudjin, my Khan according to the will of Heaven. I will serve you faithfully and obey you in all things and this I swear by the name of God.'"

Kassar repeated the oath.

Then Temudjin said to him, "Bring here two bows and two arrows."

And when Kassat had brought them, Temudjin pointed to the hill side, where they saw Baiktat and Belgutai going to herd the horses.

"Baiktat is my enemy," said Temudjin, "and my enemies cannot be allowed to live."

"Do you cover Belgutai, lest he give the alarm," answered Kassat, "and grant me this boon, to rid you of the first of your foes."

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

"It shall be so," said Temudjin, "and I will tell you when to shoot, but the responsibility is mine."

They went forward and aimed their arrows.

Baiktar saw them and held up his hand.

"Stay," he shouted. "Are you bent on fulfilling an idle threat?"

"My threats are never idle," cried Temudjin. "Prepare to meet your end."

"My eyes are opened," said Baiktar. "Nothing can stand in your way. Yet, be satisfied with killing me. Spare Belgutai!"

He bent his knees and spread out his arms. Belgutai stood petrified beside him.

"Shoot," said Temudjin to Kassar.

And the boy, who was known late as "the great archer," shot straight and true. His arrow, winged by hate, pierced the heart of Baiktar, his half brother. The fearful deed that laid the foundation of Temudjin's supremacy was accomplished.

Belgutai ran like a hare when Baiktar fell, and they did not see him again for several days. They disposed Baiktar's body decently on the ground and returned to the camp.

Juchi-Kassar's face was aflame and he trembled exceedingly. But Temudjin's look was lofty and purposeful. His mouth was set in a hard line and his nostrils were dilated.

"Where have you been?" said Hoelun, staring at them. "What have you been doing?"

Their expressions told her the truth before they could speak.

"There is blood on your hands," she shrieked. "Out on you! You have done murder! You are like dogs devouring a village, or serpents which swallow alive what they spring upon, or wolves hunting their prey!"¹ You are not

¹ Curtin.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

of the human race ! Woe is me that I should have brought monsters into the world."

"I have killed Baiktar by the hand of Kassar," said Temudjin, "and this was no murder but a just punishment. I am no monster but a Khan, with powers of life and death over my subjects. Had you taken my part in this quarrel, the outcome might have been avoided. See to it that my anger is not aroused again, for I permit no obstacle to stand in my way, and when I am thwarted who knows what will happen ? God alone knows !"

He was as merciless as fate and his belief in his destiny made him incapable of remorse. Hoelun saw that he was no longer a child to be commanded, but a man of indomitable will. Yet the discovery filled her with sorrow rather than with pride and, as she turned to serve him, she shuddered at the thought of the future.

CHAPTER IV

THE family now looked to young Temudjin as its head. His word was law and he was treated with deference, as the successor to the Khanship of Yessagai. And this result was not entirely due to the fear inspired by his swift vengeance on Baiktar. Temudjin, destined to become the greatest of all conquerors, had the gift so often associated with military genius, an extraordinary personal magnetism, that enabled him to gain the hearts of men.

His own brothers became his faithful slaves and he won even Belgutai to blind allegiance.

His achievement of this influence was moreover immediate. It could not be traced at first to confidence engendered by his deeds, though his judgment was always unerring and he never failed in any enterprise. His power sprang first from complete self-control and secondly from complete self-reliance. His faith burned like a clear flame, and lit responsive enthusiasm in every creature with whom he came into contact.

But, while he asserted his dominion over a few, there were many who remained his enemies.

A servant of Baiktar fled from the camp, moved thereto by hunger rather than grief, and, joining the tribe which had departed under the leadership of Targutai, carried with him the story of his master's death.

Already the followers of Targutai regretted having left Hoelun and her children alive, as a possible menace in the

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

land. They knew Yessagai's widow for a strong and resourceful woman, and they suspected that if Yessagai's sons survived, they would be bent on revenge. When, therefore, the mother of Baiktar heard how he had died, her wrath kindled embers that were already smouldering.

"Shall we leave this snake in our path, shall we suffer this wild beast called Temudjin to roam unmolested?" she cried. "Nay, let us return and seek him out and, when we have captured him, let us torture him until his spirit is broken."

Targutai's tribesmen were now known as the Taidjuts and their enmity against Temudjin was long and ferocious. Thus aroused, the whole horde rode forth to take him.

One day Hoelun beheld the horsemen in the distance. Their numbers and their spear points shining in the sun brought fear to her heart. Her instinct was as certain as Temudjin's, though it was protective rather than constructive. She gave the alarm, the camp was struck and Temudjin mounted and led the way to Mount Targunai, where they might hope to find some hiding place.

The lower slopes of the mountain were covered with a forest of larch and spruce, but below the wood a cliff studded with juniper bushes contained holes and caves of varying size.

While Hoelun and her children sought refuge in one of these caves, the men under Temudjin's orders felled trees to block the entrance. When the barricade was erected, the first of the Taidjuts appeared and shouted to Temudjin to surrender.

But he, commanding the servants to join his mother, cried out to the enemy, "If it is only I you want, come and find me!"

Then, urging his horse up the hillside, he fled among the trees. A shower of arrows followed him and Juchi-

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Kassar, at the entrance of the cave, not to be outdone, aimed his bow and shot many shafts at the advancing Taidjuts.

They, however, did not pause for retaliation. The capture of Temudjin alone was their aim, and they did not care what happened to the rest of the family. They swarmed in their thousands over the cliff and, on its summit, disposed themselves in a great circle, surrounding the mountain.

Let Temudjin hide himself with infinite cunning, he could not now escape them, since they would wait till necessity drove him forth.

Temudjin's greatest friends, now as ever, were the trees and rocks. The hardness of stone called to the strength of his spirit and supported it, the straight upstanding trunks and the wide flung branches of wood were to him tender and intimate. He felt safer in this company than among any multitude of men, for here was the justice of God, from which humanity had departed. He merged himself in the secret places of the mountain and knew a great freedom.

But since he was human and could not exist on the elements of earth, air and water, sufficient to his associates, the power that upheld him was also capable of overwhelming him with the primitive urge of hunger. He fed on berries and the life-force within him cried for more solid sustenance, and wrung his stomach with iron hands. It drove him till he caught a coney and devoured it raw, lest the smoke of a fire should indicate his whereabouts to his enemies. It would not let him sleep or rest and, after three days, he made an attempt to escape.

At night he rode down a shale slope of the mountain, intending to reach the low land, but as he went, the horse slipping at every step, suddenly he lurched and fell to the ground. The mishap was extraordinary and unexpected

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

and he soon found the reason. The rotten girth of his saddle had broken and the insecurity of his seat had cast him to the ground. This to Temudjin was, however, more than mere accident. His faith, his unquenchable belief that the power which tortured him held him absolutely in its keeping, told him that here was an omen of greater danger. It meant him to turn back, and he could do nothing but obey its commands.

He abode three more days on the mountain, wandering from slope to slope, enduring great pain, yet knowing a strange ecstasy from the sense of affinity with his surroundings.

Then he tried once more to leave the place. At early dawn he came to the edge of a precipitous cliff, overhung with loosely balanced boulders. To any but a desperate adventurer, the way must have been impassable. But Temudjin on foot determined to drag his horse over the rocks, and with the animal to scramble down. There was just one track they might be able to take together, if fortune favoured them. He pulled the unwilling beast forward. Its hoof struck against a boulder and set it moving. The earth fell away under their feet. With a terrified neigh, the horse sprang back to safety, wrenching the bridle rein from the boy's hand. Temudjin, flung flat on his back, dug heels and elbows into the racing ground, felt stones and rocks hurtling round his head, heard the roar of the landslide like a noise of many waters, and knew that he was still alive.

Dazed and bruised, he raised himself on hands and knees and saw that the way was utterly blocked. No creature but a bird flying high through the air or a beast burrowing low through the earth could hope to pass that barrier. The eternal voice had spoken again. "You shall not go, Temudjin."

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

He crawled up and back to solid ground and lay exhausted for many hours. The faithful horse stood over him and whinnied without gaining any response. As in a dream, he rose at last and wandered through the forest. Many voices called to him—the voices of the wind in the tree tops and the less audible voices of material beings.

“Stay with us, Temudjin. You are not fated to leave us, for you are bound to us by a great love. Your body is straight as the trunks of trees, and your sinews are hard as the structure of rocks. Yet are you built of the same dust as we are, and your bones shall surely mingle with ours again. So shall you be no longer divided from us by outward form, which is vanity and illusion, and you shall dwell in us and we in you.”

“I cannot stay with you,” whispered Temudjin with dry lips. “I must fulfil my destiny.”

“Nay, this is your destiny, Temudjin, to find peace in our midst. What is the world of men that it should lure you? Is any power like unto our power? Is any beauty like unto our beauty? Do you desire riches? Here is the gold of sunlight and the silver of moonshine, the pearls of dew and the rubies of budding leaves, the rich velvet of moss and the silken shimmer of leaves. Here there is music and fantasy and romance. Here there is strife and peril and sport. Here there is all you want of life and, when you are weary, here is rest.”

“I will not stay with you,” cried Temudjin. “This is not my destiny.”

And he abode three more days on the mountain, hearing these voices and resisting them.

At the end of this time his will, more powerful than any persuasion, bade him arise and prove himself the equal of soaring bird or burrowing beast, in finding freedom. He

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

went again to the place of the landslide and, knowing that he could not cast himself down over the tumbled rocks and survive, he set himself, with a short knife and with tearing hands, to cut a way round through the earth. As patient prisoners have worked on stone walls with no better tool than a rusty nail, so more quickly but with almost equal difficulty, he achieved his purpose.

In twenty-four hours he traversed the cliff and went down the mountain, believing that no mortal enemy would look for his egress by that impossible route.

But the Taidjuts were ever watchful and their circle had not been withdrawn. They beheld him, a slight, boyish figure, moving slowly and staggering as he moved. His aspect was frightful and scarcely human. His ragged clothes were covered with earth, the matted hair that hung over his blue eyes and shadowed his ghastly face was caked with dust, and his bleeding hands hung limp at his sides. He had the wild look of some mysterious denizen of the taiga, or of one who has seen and heard terrible things, commonly hidden from the senses of man.

For a little while they watched him, struck to immobility by amazement, not daring to approach what they could only take for his ghost. Then, as he, overcome by the failure of his hopes, fell to the ground, they rushed forward with loud and brutal cries of triumph. They raised him and their jubilation increased, when they found he was not dead. With fiendish laughter and obscene jests, they dragged him into their midst, buffeting him, spitting upon him and acclaiming him, ironically, as the unconquerable Khan.

Temudjin looked from face to face and saw no mercy there. The expression of every countenance surrounding him was vile with a cruelty peculiar to humans, and it filled him with an unutterable disdain. They might kill him,

62

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

but that would only be to rid him of their offensive company. They might torture him, but that would only be to prove his superiority to them, since no pains they inflicted could equal those he had already endured at stronger hands.

They put on him a kang—the indignity reserved for prisoners of the lowest type—a fetter and an instrument of torment in one. It was a heavy flat square of wood, weighing on the shoulders, cutting the neck with the rough edges of the hole that imprisoned the head, and having two more holes on either side to fasten the upraised hands.

Having thus rendered him helpless, they tied a rope around his middle and made him follow one of their horse men as they proceeded to their own camping-ground. But first, to restore his strength that he might not die too soon, they gave him sparingly to eat, marvelling among themselves how he had gone without food for nine days.

Temudjin spoke no word in answer to their questions or their taunts. He submitted to all they did to him. His pride was that of a lion, his look was that of an eagle gazing to far horizons. And the strength of his bearing struck that host of Taidjuts as with a spell, so that, although they held him fast, they were penetrated with doubt and fear and the idea that he might escape them yet.

When they reached their own territory, near a river many miles distant, they evolved a plan to circumvent the chance that, through this strange influence, Temudjin might gain his freedom. The suspicion that possessed them was directed against each other. They felt that, given the slightest opportunity, this boy of 14 was still capable of imposing his will on any one of them, and that thereby he might win a friend. Therefore it was arranged that he should be kept under guard no longer than one day and one night in each tent. Directly one set of watchful eyes had grown accus-

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

tomed to the sight of him, he must be removed to the charge of others, more keen and more hostile. In this way, and with wearing torment that prevented sleep, they hoped to break the spirit of Temudjin.

One evening, as he sat in the darkness of a yurt, knees drawn up to the kang, shoulders bowed and arms paralysed by the intolerable strain of their position, the door-flap opened and an old woman entered. She shuddered at the sight of him and shrank away into the furthest corner of the tent.

"Woe is me, that they should have put you here, evil one!" she cried. "Even in a little while, who knows what trouble your accursed presence may bring on my man and me?"

Temudjin turned his blue eyes upon her and they seemed to blaze like coals of fire in the gloom. "I shall not harm you, woman," he said.

"Do not look on me," she cried, "for that which is written in your face fills me with dread."

"Justly so," answered Temudjin, staring at her still. "I am young and you are ancient, but I have knowledge which you shall only learn, when you descend into the grave long before me."

Against her will she was drawn towards him.

"Truly you are very young," she said. "At your age my son was a stouter man."

"You loved him well before he outgrew your care?"

"Ay, and he grew apace. One day he rode out alone and, in fording the river, was swept away and drowned. Aïe! They brought him in to me, and his body was cold and his face was pale like yours."

"And his hair hung wet over his brow, mother, and his hands were wounded by the sharp rocks to which he had clung."

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

"Even so—aïe ! I could not warm his hands."

"My hair falls into my eyes, mother. Will you not put it back ?"

She laid her hand on his head. "Your hair is dry. The green weeds clung to his."

"But my hands are cold and wounded too. Will you not ease them, mother ?"

She touched his hands and her wrinkled mouth quivered. Then, moving slowly, she brought water and washed his face. Also she brought grease and anointed his wrists and bound them with rags, where the kang had galled them. And having done this, she fed him with milk and with morsels of meat, which she put between his lips with her fingers.

"I thank you for your service," said Temudjin. "I shall not forget it."

A man came into the yurt. He was the woman's husband and his name was Sorgan Shira.

"What are you doing ?" he said in anger and amazement, seeing her kneeling beside Temudjin, and hastily closing the door-flap behind him.

"The boy is in our charge for to-night. He is helpless. I am relieving his pain that he may live a little longer."

"That is no concern of yours. Let him alone."

"The woman has done well," said Temudjin. "Was not her son also yours ? She tended me for his sake. If my father Yessagai were still living, you would see that he loved me as you loved your boy."

"I rode under Yessagai in many forays," said the Taidjut, "and I remember how he rejoiced when you were born. You will never be our leader, though he might have willed it."

"My father's will is my will," said Temudjin, "and nothing can prevent me from ruling. Set me free, and I will reward you richly."

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

"It cannot be done," answered Sorgan Shira. "You have no power to fulfil your promise, and my life would be forfeit for your escape."

"Nay, nay, we cannot help you," said the woman, taking fright from her husband's words.

"You have helped me already," said Temudjin, "and I shall remember it."

"When you go to your ancestors, tell Yessagai what we did for you," said Sorgan Shira, and he bade his wife fetch more rags and wrapped them round Temudjin's neck against the rough edge of the kang. Also he put a pad of felt under the kang to protect Temudjin's shoulders. And all this he did in silence and as though despite himself.

To celebrate their triumph in the capture of Temudjin, the Taidjuts held a feast beside the river at a little distance from the camp, where some large trees afforded pleasant shade. But before they congregated in this spot, they tied their prisoner's feet with a stout cord and left him in the open, deputing a boy of his own age to watch him. Thus with hands, feet and head confined, how could any human being, reduced to weakness by slow torment, hope to escape?

The shades of evening were falling, when they went off to their feast. Resentful of the duty which kept him from the merry-making, the lad turned his eyes from the miserable creature, sitting near the yurts, and busied himself with sharpening the pointed stick he carried.

Temudjin moaned without attracting his attention. Though he heard the pitiful sound, it only reminded him of the pleasure he was losing, through guarding one who must in any case soon die. Then Temudjin rolled over on to his side and raised himself on his knees. Why should he not move to relieve his cramped posture? It was not possible

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

for him to move far. The lad whistled a tune and unconcernedly continued to cut his stick.

On his knees, Temudjin crawled slowly and painfully into the nearest yurt. Something he had seen there, something he remembered, called to the unquenchable vital spark within him. Who knows what it was? A knife-edged iron brazier, in which the fuel was extinct? An old discarded sword hanging against the felt? Whatever it was, he knew it, fettered as he was, for the instrument of his salvation. So far as he could, he reclined on his back and rubbed the cord that tethered his feet against the sharp edge, until that cord was severed.

When the lad with the stick looked up and round, he saw Temudjin standing with his legs free in the doorway of the yurt. With a shout, the Taidjut leaped towards that fearful apparition. But it ran to meet him and felled him to the earth, by striking him with the edge of the kang. Then, with the swiftness of a ghost, it sped along the bank of the river and, when the lad could raise his bruised body and collect his stunned faculties, it was lost. He hastened to give the alarm, which threw the Taidjuts into a state of frenzy. Their horsemen mounted and went galloping hither and thither. Ferocious shouts broke the stillness and filled the darkling air.

"He cannot escape—he cannot be far away! No man with head and hands so fastened could go any distance, or hide for long. Find him, find him!"

The stars shone out in the sky. A full moon rose and threw her naked light on the water and a black cloak over the forest. Here, where it was darkest, they searched throughout the night for Temudjin. Sorgan Shira, with a strange elation in his heart, held off from the hunt and rode along the border of the river. Suddenly his horse, a white nosed sorrel mare, shied away from the stream.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

"What do you see, little coward?" he said, leaning forward in his saddle and patting her neck. Then he too saw what had startled her. Beyond a clump of reeds, a livid face apparently floated on the water in the moonlight. Around it the stream rippled as though by some submerged disturbance of its surface. In the livid face, the shadowed eyes moved, proclaiming it alive—they moved and met the eyes of Sorgan Shira.

The Taidjut said to his horse in a loud voice, "There is nothing there, foolish one. We will return to the others and tell them to abandon the search till daylight. If this Temudjin has escaped, he had best go on and find his mother. For the sake of Yessagai we cannot betray him."

Then he rode away from the river and, having met and spoken to some other horsemen, he went in to his own yurt and retired to rest. Next day he arose very early and went down to the water, saying he would bathe before he joined the hunt again, but he would let no one go with him, and, when he came back, none were more eager than he to scour the forest and none seemed more anxious than he to find Temudjin there.

But, as the second night descended, he seemed to lose hope and though he bore the disappointment with more fortitude than most, his old wife could not sleep, for thinking of the boy who had talked to her about her son.

As she lay awake beside him on their couch, when all was dark and still, the door-flap stirred as though some clumsy hand tried to force an entrance. She sat up in a fright. And there came round the edge of the felt, lifting it, so that she saw the pin points of stars beyond, a flat square of wood surrounding a face and two uplifted hands, above a dimly discerned figure. And she could see that this face was of a greyish pallor and that the hair hung wet on the brow, so that she was reminded of her son, when they brought him

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

in drowned. Then her mouth fell open and she would have cried aloud, but Sorgan Shira was also awake and he put his hand over her mouth.

There came a whisper, "Arise, man, and take this thing from off my shoulders. I, Temudjin, your Khan, the son of Heaven and of Yessagai, command you!"

Sorgan Shira, the old soldier, knew the voice of authority wherever it sounded. He rose up and obeyed this voice and his wife rose up too, and when they had taken off the kang, they put dry clothes on Temudjin, who had stayed hidden in the river, for a night and a day and chafed his lifeless hands and set food before him.

"I cannot stay here in your yurt," said Temudjin, "for I should surely be found and trouble would come upon you. But you must hide me till my enemies are weary of searching and then I will go away."

They heard a sound of movement among the surrounding yurts. The Taidjuts were restless for their prey. Sorgan Shira took Temudjin out at the back of his tent and softly roused two sons he had by another wife, who were sleeping under the shelter of a cart laden with woolsacks.

"Here is one that you must help me to hide where he shall not be discovered," he said. "Hasten, for the danger is very great."

The young men put Temudjin inside the cart and covered him close with the woolsacks. Then they and their father joined the Taidjuts, who were prowling about the camp and tried to lure them away, while the old wife within the yurt, broke the kang with a hatchet and concealed the pieces beneath the couch.

But the Taidjuts were suspicious and seemed to scent their quarry. Like wild dogs after a rabbit, like vultures drawn to a carcass, they were aware of Temudjin's presence. They searched from tent to tent. They looked under

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

every khibitka and lifted every covering. Presently a few of them came to Sorgan Shira's cart.

"There is nothing there but a pile of woolsacks," said Sorgan Shira. "If we overset them the wool will be spilled. It is easy to see that no one with a kang about his neck could lie beneath them."

"It is easier still to test the matter," said one of the men and he ran his spear through the woolsacks. His companions laughed and followed his example. Temudjin, pierced through the thigh, fastened his teeth in his wrist and made no sound.

"No living thing could be there," said Sorgan Shira, wiping his brow, and the men rode on satisfied. Indeed the old soldier hardly believed that Temudjin had survived, but, when his chance came to remove the woolsacks, he found the boy faint but undaunted. He took him again into his yurt and bound his wound.

"Now do I know," he said, "that you are the worthy successor of Yessagai Bahadur, whom I followed in the old days. I served you first for his sake and again for his sake and yet again. But now I love you for yourself, as the bravest of the brave. And I declare myself to be your man, in life and death. To-morrow night, oh! my Khan, I will mount you on my white-nosed sorrel mare, which is as the child of my heart, swift to obey my voice and very dear to me. But my saddle I cannot give you, for I am poor and shall not find another."

Then came in the two young men who had hidden Temudjin and, at their father's command, which fulfilled the promptings of their own hearts, they made obeisance to him, and one gave him his own bow and the other gave him two arrows.

"Only flint and steel, we cannot give you," they said, "lest you be tempted to strike fire and be seen in the way."

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

But the old wife went out and found the carcass of a fat lamb, newly killed and boiled, and this she brought in and gave to Temudjin with a skin of mare's milk. And thus spoke she before he departed :

“Men will love you for a glory that is past or a glory that is yet to come. For the sake of old favours or for the sake of new rewards, they will serve you and bring you their gifts. But I would fill your stomach and save your life, because I saw your face as the face of one drowned in the river, and him I could not feed or warm or care for any more at all.”

CHAPTER V

THE white-nosed sorrel mare carried Temudjin well, as he rode back to the place where he had left his family. In these days he grew to love the beast as a friend and she transferred her affection from Sorgan Shira to him, as though she felt herself honoured by his mastery.

They came to Mount Targunai and found the cave, where Hoelun and her children had hid, deserted. The ground was blackened with old fires, and the bodies of two Taidjuts, shot by Juchi-Kassar's arrows, lay below the cliff, but no other bodies were there. The track of khibitka wheels, however, ran down to the river Onon and following this track Temudjin reached a place called Kimurha. Here a lonely shepherd told him that many days since a small cavalcade of horses and people, with one cart among them drawn by an old pied cow had passed that way, making for the hills where the pasture was still good.

Temudjin rode on, searched over Mount Baitar and at last found his mother and his brothers camped on an upland known as Mount Horchukin. They were overjoyed to see him again, not knowing how they should survive through the winter without his leadership.

He made light of his adventures and at once inspired them with new courage to face the trials and difficulties of the future. Somehow they contrived to exist and overcome the rigours of the season.

"Heaven would not have delivered me out of the hands of the Taidjuts and led me back to you, if it were destined

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

that I should perish of cold and hunger or that I should see you die," said Temudjin. And he set Juchi-Kassar and Udjughen to break holes in the ice that they might still catch fish in the river, while he trapped hares in the snow and made new arrows to replace those that were lost, for shooting any game that flew or ran.

Once they made a raid into a valley and drove off some sheep and goats and hid them in their rocky fastness. That was a great day, and they made themselves new coats out of the sheepskins to protect them from freezing. The women and the child Taimulun lay in the shelter of their single yurt. But the men and boys stretched themselves under their horses' bellies when they slept and took warmth from the bodies of their animals.

Spring-time came at last and they moved to Mount Burhan and the highland Gulyalgu and thence to the river Sangur and the hill Kara Jiruga. They never dared to stay long in one place lest their occasional desperate forays should bring on them retaliation. They lived like savages and had the aspect of wolves. No meat that was edible came amiss to their appetites. They trapped marmots and field-mice and often devoured them raw. No Mongol willingly eats such vermin, but their extremity knew no law. Their sinews became as iron and their skins like hard leather. And small as was their company they grew to be known as a menace in the land, so that men feared to attack them, saying that their power was not earthly.

Word of their activities came to the Taidjuts and held them with superstitious dread.

"This Temudjin is no man but a demon," they said. "Did he not escape from our midst when we held him fast? No fetters could bind him and death would not touch him. In the morning he was there and in the evening he ran away swiftly and vanished."

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

But their leader Todoyan said to them. "If you will not go again and take him, ride forth and wait the chance and take his few horses. For man or wingless demon cannot go far on two legs, and it was passing strange that the white-nosed sorrel mare of Sorgan Shira vanished so soon after Temudjin."

This he said, not suspecting Sorgan Shira, who had grieved sorely for the loss of his horse, but believing that Temudjin had found a way to steal it. Also he knew that without any horse Temudjin and his family must before long perish miserably. Then those Taidjuts rode forth and waiting their opportunity, they found eight horses grazing in a valley below the poor camp and drove them all away. No others did Temudjin possess, excepting only the sorrel mare and, mounted on her, he had gone off on some expedition.

When he returned the men were cursing and the women were wailing. Juchi-Kassar's face was dark with rage, little Udjughen sobbed aloud and Belgutai shook his clenched fist above his head.

"If the horses are lost they must be brought back," said Temudjin, when he heard what had happened.

"I will follow them on foot, running very fast and resting not night or day until I find them," said Juchi-Kassar.

"Nay, let me go, for I am the smaller," said Udjughen, "and there is less chance that I shall be seen."

"I am only your half-brother," said Belgutai, "therefore you three should stay together and this service should be mine. And if I fail to recover the horses, may I die like Baiktat."

But Temudjin said, "I will go, and stay you all here till I come back. The sorrel mare is still mine and she shall carry no one else in pursuit of the Taidjuts."

They entreated him not to leave them, not to risk falling again into the hands of his enemies. He was obdurate and rode away into the night.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

His energy was boundless and it filled him with the strength of ten.

"Velvet nose," he said to the sorrel mare, "do you scent out your friends and I will scent out my foes."

She pricked her ears and galloped forward. But they went for three days, without coming on the trail of the Taidjuts. On the morning of the fourth day, Temudjin saw a young man milking a mare near the road and drawing rein he asked for a drink. The young man gave it to him and asked his name.

"I am a Khan," said Temudjin, "and ruler over this land."

"Never have I beheld any Khan so meanly mounted," answered the young man, for indeed the sorrel was thin and in poor condition.

"Judge not man or beast by their appearance only," said Temudjin. "This horse of mine has a good heart and I prize her above all my other horses, which have been taken away by some rascally thieves. Have you seen them go this way?"

"Yesterday I saw a great company of Taidjuts pass driving before them eight ponies which I remarked for their miserable appearance. Could these have been yours?"

"They were my whole wealth and though they may find better food, they will not find a better owner."

"A man cannot do more than love the animal that shares his lot. But the one that carries you now is near foundered, so leave her here near the yurt of my father, Nahu Boyan, and I, Boorchu, will lend you another horse and go with you after the rest. For Khan or no Khan, your speech is pleasant to my ear and your words are just."

So they did, and travelling together for three more days on the trail of the Taidjuts which Boorchu pointed out, they came at last by night to the enemies' camp and stealing into

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

it unawares found the eight horses tethered in the midst. Then Boorchu crawled forward and cut their heel ropes and Temudjin following swift behind herded them out.

Once beyond the camp it was hey ! and away for them. Stopping not for caution, they shouted to the steeds and galloped fast. But the Taidjuts heard them go and one of them leapt to his white stallion and pursued ahead of all the others.

As the morning broke this horseman was close behind them. Temudjin looked back and saw him unsling a coil of rope from his saddle bow.

“ Give me your bow, oh ! Boorchu and one arrow ! ”

Then in the same moment as the Taidjut threw his lasso, Termudjin let fly the shaft and it struck his enemy through the heart. The white stallion did not stop in his wild career. He reached them with his master's body fallen forward in the saddle. And they threw the body of the Taidjut down and drove the stallion on with the other horses, riding so hard and fast that, before the sun had touched the meridian, they had covered three days' distance.

They came to the yurt of Boorchu's father, Nahu Boyan, where the sorrel mare welcomed Temudjin and her own friends with loud whinnyings. Nahu Boyan, an old and simple man, also welcomed them in human fashion, with meat and milk in abundance.

And after Temudjin had rested there a while and made these good people his friends for life, he told them they should hear from him again, and departed with his horses.

Thus he retrieved what had been stolen from him, showing how he would soon regain everything else his enemies had taken, honour, wealth and might. And he came back to his own people, who rejoiced and marvelled at his prowess.

Time passed and Temudjin established some sort of position for himself as a terror to his enemies and an inspira-

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

tion to his friends. His age was now 17, and romantic longings mingled with his dreams of world conquest. He had never forgotten Bortai, his little play-fellow, his promised bride.

One day he said to Hoelun, "I have the wish to marry. I shall go and claim Bortai as my wife."

She did not question the fulfilment of his desire. Unlikely as it might seem that Dai-sensen or any man would be willing to keep the promise he had given to Yessagai, when Yessagai was dead and Yessagai's son, the destined bridegroom, had been despoiled of his heritage, she did not doubt, no one could have doubted, that Temudjin was capable of imposing his will.

So he sought out his beloved and found that she kept him still in her heart. And he told Dai-sensen of his circumstances, saying, "Do you fear to give your daughter to me, or do you regret our agreement?"

"I had a dream," answered Dai-sensen, "and following close on that dream I met you in the way. Though I might doubt my own judgment, though I might not yield to your persuasions, I have faith in omens and this dream was an omen of greatness. Therefore I yield you my daughter, knowing that her destiny will be glorious."

"You are the wise father of one who is beautiful and also wise," said Temudjin. "Bortai is like a song in my mouth and like a star over my head. Having her, I shall never look back, but I shall press on from power to power and leave a mighty kingdom to our children."

"You are young yet to talk of your children," said Dai-sensen, "and your speech is that of a lover, full of wind and music. Many years lie before you and you will look on other women. Yet my dream signified that Bortai should be remembered as the mother of your sons. In the minds of men they will come first with you and she will come

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

afterwards, but they who look a little further back will find me and my white bird. So I shall not be forgotten."

The mother of Bortai, whose name was Sotan, had not the faith of Dai-setsen. She was troubled at the thought of her daughter's fate. She had no belief in and no desire for her own immortality, being a woman, limited to one existence. And she could not let her child go alone into the midst of unknown perils among a company of wild adventurers. She decided to accompany Bortai to her new home and Temudjin agreed to the arrangement. Dai-setsen went with them a part of the way and then turned back.

Bortai took, as a present to Hoelun, a magnificent cloak of black sable—the golden fleece of modern times, and perhaps also of the ancients—the priceless fur for which even the Argonauts may have risked their lives, when they voyaged over inland seas to the forests that bordered those seas. Dai-setsen had collected the skins for many years and now, rich and soft and light in weight, the cloak was indeed worth a king's ransom. Hoelun was delighted with the gift. She wrapped the splendid garment round her rags and took from its luxurious warmth some memory of happier days with Yessagai.

But Temudjin, having installed his bride in a new yurt, came to his mother with purpose in his eye.

"She whom you have chosen is a fair maiden and I am well pleased with her," began Hoelun, assuming a regal air with her new wealth.

"I come not to talk of Bortai," he answered laconically. "Tell me who was the greatest friend of my father when he lived."

"There were many who called themselves his friends while he had power to hold them. When he was gone they cared not for us."

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

"Was not any one of them greater than another, not more faithful but mightier in himself?"

"Ay! Togrul of the Keraites, powerful in his own country, was your father's anda. They swore eternal alliance and brotherhood. They had one life and gave each other precious gifts and slept together under one blanket. Yet when your father died, did Togrul die of grief or seek to avenge the insult to his memory? Nay, he prospered and waxed fat. Never did he consider anything but his own advantage."

"Then this Togrul is still great and worthy of my notice?"

Hoelun smiled, stroking the rich fur.

"He is a Khan and very strong. It is we who would be beneath his notice, having nothing to offer him."

"I am also a Khan in my own right. If I show him my importance he will welcome my friendship."

"How can you show what you have not got? There are a few who believe in you, but Togrul will not be easily convinced. Years ago he made an alliance with his brother Kushluk of the Naimans, that they might together draw a ring round Kara Khitai, where Chiluku, the grandson of Yelü Tashi still reigns, but only in name. Yelü was a mighty conqueror and his dominion extended westward over many lands. Kashgar, Yarkend, Khotan and Turkistan knew his power, and his fame spread across the wide world. They said even that he was not mortal. Strange tales about him circulate still—that he was a priest as well as a king and the friend of God, Who promised that he should never taste death.¹ Yet we know he died or how

¹In reference to Prester John, Yule says: "The first notice of a conquering Eastern potentate was brought to Europe by the Syrian bishop of Gabala. Dr. Gustavus Oppert showed this account must apply to the founder of Kara Khitai—Yelü Tashi. He was called Gurkhan, which was confounded with Johannes."

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

could Chiluku have succeeded him? And these two, Togrul and Kushluk who now threaten Chiluku, must be greater than the great Yelui."

"Assuredly. So rumour must have lied and one of *them* must be the friend of God. Whichever it is, he shall be my ally, for I also am favoured of Heaven."

"It remains for you to prove it."

"I will," said Temudjin. "Take off that cloak. I must send it as a gift to Togrul, who will see thereby that the son of Yessagai is no poor suppliant for his favour."

Protests were unavailing. Though Hoelum wept she recognised his wisdom. Who could doubt that the sender of so flattering, so magnificent a present must be a person of some consequence and one who could easily afford to part with it?

And after all she was not long robbed of her sables. Bortai's gift was sent to Togrul with complimentary messages from "Temudjin, Rightful Khan of all the Mongols, Son of Heaven and of Yessagai."

The Khan of the Keraits received it graciously and returned expressions of warm esteem. They said moreover that he shed tears over the thought of his former anda and swore to support the successor of his old friend. The result of favour gained in a high quarter was soon apparent. Mongols of various tribes deserted their own people to join the camp of Temudjin, who seemed likely to become a notable leader. Among them came an old man, one Charchiutai, a famous blacksmith from the region of Mount Burhan. With him he brought his son, Chelmai, a youth of Temudjin's own age, and presenting him said, "Oh! Khan, when your father reigned, this boy was promised to you with a wrap of fine sable at your birth. Many years have I spent in training Chelmai to be your faithful servant. Many years have I spent in collecting the choicest

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

skins for that wrap. Now I offer you both in token of allegiance. The one shall be as a sword in your hand and is fitted to be first in your assembly. The other shall be a covering for your couch and will ensure you repose. Deign to accept, oh ! Khan, in my life work the two things needful to a conqueror—a stout heart by day and a soft pillow by night.”

Temudjin grasped the hand of Chelmai and set him beside Boorchu, who had already served him so well and who had now joined him, in a place of honour. But the sable wrap he gave to Hoelun, saying. “ The time has not yet come when I can sleep in ease.”

Temudjin and Bortai loved each other well. As children they had played together. As youth and maiden a pure flame burned in both their hearts and never died between them. They rode together like good comrades, Bortai dressed as befitted a Mongol matron in a nunlike hood, surmounted by the Botta, nearer to her young husband than any of his brothers, dearer to him than his dear friends, Boorchu and Chelmai. At night she lay in a separate yurt, and when he was not with her, he rested beside his horse.

In the only other yurt they possessed, the older women, Hoelun and Sotan, slept together with the child Taimulun and her old nurse Hoakchin, who stretched herself on the ground.

Just before daybreak one morning, when all the camp was wrapped in slumber, this faithful servant started from her dreams, went out from the tent and laid her ear to the earth. A premonition of sudden danger had surely not deceived her. The vision of a great host advancing against them was confirmed by faint and distant sounds in the darkness, the sound of horses' hoofs moving rhythmically in massed

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

formation, beating through the night, like the beating of a heart, approaching, growing louder. . . .

Hoakchin rose, tore open the door-flap behind her and shrieked—

“Oh ! Mother, wake ! I hear the earth tremble. Oh ! Mother, the Taidjuts, our enemies, are upon us. Hasten, oh ! Mother.”

Confusion descended upon the camp. Hoelun ran out, carrying Taimulun and calling to Temudjin. Sotan fled to her daughter. The men sprang to their horses. Juchi-Kassar and Udjughen helped their mother to mount a steed with her burden and were for hurrying her away. But her thought was only for her eldest son, the leader without whom they could not survive.

“Temudjin, oh ! Temudjin, look to yourself ! Nothing else matters. It is you who are threatened. It is you whom they pursue. I will see to the safety of the others if you will but escape.”

She prevailed on the boys to leave her and aid the most important member of the family. Temudjin had his saddle beast ready.

“Take Bortai,” he called to Hoelun, “and hide in the folds of the hills until I come again to fetch you.”

So commanding, he galloped off, followed by his brothers and by Boorchu and Chelmai.

Then Hoelun considered nothing but her own safety and that of Taimulun. With the few remaining men she left the yurts and their occupants, left Hoakchin, Sotan and Bortai, and fled.

“Alas ! woe is me,” cried Sotan, when she realised they had gone. “We are deserted and this is the end of us. See what comes of trusting people like these !”

“Temudjin cannot have meant to desert me,” said Bortai, while Hoakchin ran through the camp apparently

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

seeking some hiding place. "He did right to leave all females behind and save his own life. But would I had gone with him. I am strong and I would have ridden as far and as fast as any man without tiring."

She spoke bravely but her face was pale. The enemy were coming close. Baulked of their prey and furious they would not leave the camp unmolested. The tents would be pillaged and on the defenceless women they would wreak their vengeance.

Sotan and Bortai followed the old nurse. They found her harnessing a cow to a small black khibitka and helped her hastily and in silence. When the cow was attached they all three climbed into the cart, Sotan and Bortai behind under the hood and Hoakchin sitting on the shaft, to drive the animal. As the ravaging band gained the place, the khibitka with its load, crawled away, unobserved, down the opposite slope of the hill. But it was not long undetected. The grey dawn broke and some horsemen overtook the cart on the bank of the Tungela river.

"Who are you, hag?" they questioned Hoakchin.

"I am a shearer of sheep," she answered. "I serve the rich and am on my way home now."

"Know you Temudjin the brigand? Have you been to his yurt?"

"I have heard tell of him, but he is not there at present. He is gone with all his people, I know not where."

The men rode on and Hoakchin urged forward the cow. The khibitka swayed and creaked. Suddenly it lurched over to one side. The axle had broken.

"We must proceed on foot and hide ourselves in the forest," said the old woman.

But as Bortai and Sotan were about to descend she cried out to them, "Nay, lie close. The horsemen are returning and come this way."

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

They obeyed her, cowering beneath the hood.

"What have you there?" demanded the first of the riders.

"It is only some wool that I take to my own place. Leave me alone. Who are you that concern yourself with my business?"

"The hag has a rough tongue," laughed the man, "yet we will humour her with information. We are a few of a great company sent against Temudjin, woman. We come of three clans of Merkits. Our friends the Taidjuts dare not approach this young wolf, but we, remembering how Yessagai, his father, snatched away the bride of our brother Yeke Chilaidu, many years ago, will draw the fangs of the wolf, Temudjin, in vengeance. Then will Hoelun his mother, regret that she did not bear him as the son of Chilaidu. Now, since we have satisfied you, let us look at your wool, oh! shearer of sheep."

With rough laughter, they dragged Sotan and Bortai out of the cart.

"Ho, ho! here is an old ewe that hath not yet lost her wool!"

"And here also a comely lamb which we can surely use. Struggle not, young one, but tell us your name."

Bortai was silent, lest knowing whose wife she was they should hold her as a hostage for her lord. Yet her heart let out a voiceless and exceeding bitter cry,

"Temudjin, oh! Temudjin!"

Where were you, oh! Temudjin, when they ravished your play-fellow, your love? They set her on a horse with Hoakchin, whose courage they respected, and carried her away. But Sotan, who would not cease screaming and fighting, they killed before her daughter's eyes and threw her body into the river.

Temudjin, oh! Temudjin, many tears will not wash away

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

that blood, more blood must flow before those tears can be dried !

Far and away galloped Temudjin, followed by Juchi-Kassar and Udjughen and Belgutai, in company with Boorchu and Chelmai, and pursued by the rest of the Merkits. The enemy followed his tracks to Mount Burhan, a place familiar to him from long residence on its slopes, but they could not overtake him. Through roadless ravines, he sped onward and upward, and they could find no way they dared to take. As though he and his brothers were gifted with wings, they passed over morasses in which the horses of the Merkits stuck fast and disappeared in impenetrable thickets which no other man could pass.

“After him, after him ! Drag the steeds from the bogs, hew down the trees, shoot arrows into the bushes, so that they fall like rain. He must know some secret path. What one knows another can discover. He shall not escape us as he escaped the Taidjuts.”

Yet, this, indeed, was what he did. Hampered rather than aided by his fellows, who had not his strength or cunning and could only help him with blind obedience, he saved himself and them and brought them out through the taiga on to the upper part of the mountain. Treacherous and sticky ground seemed to offer bridges for his horse ; branches, like the arms of friends, seemed to open wide a way at his approach, and close again behind him, roots and rocks, that would have been barriers to any who knew them not so well, gave him foothold as he climbed.

At last they won to the summit. Here the mountain showed them its face, terrible and stern. Black rocks, seamed with ice, edged a snow field that rose to the peak and caught the last rays of the setting sun. The pursuit had lasted throughout the day and they had stopped not for food or rest.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

At early dawn, Temudjin had seemed to hear the voice of Bortai calling to him, but he could not return or stay, and believing her to be safe with the other women, he told himself that their mutual desire should yet reunite them.

Now he thought rather of the mountain that had saved him, than of himself or of any human friend. Mount Burhan appeared to him as one of the abodes of God, that power which had him in its keeping and was most worthy of his worship. It was a holy place, a sanctuary. Its groves were full of mystery, its cliffs had tested his endurance. Its head was venerable and majestic. Awful was the expression of its countenance and the light of its spirit shone with a dazzling radiance. Like an unimaginable treasure of diamonds and pearls, covering a great area, was the crystalline resplendence of the snow, dyed by the sun with tones of rose and violet and amber. Its purity was exquisite as pain, its divine beauty was unbearable. Its rapt stillness was like a hymn rising to the darker sky above. Its peace was pregnant with the suggestion of spear-points glistening in serried rows, line upon line to endless distances. No cold negation of power was here, no calm meditation removing the mind from the stress and turmoil of earth. But the whiteness of the snow was full of glory and colour like fire, and its brilliance was like the voices of giants shouting aloud.

And with a joyous shout Temudjin answered the vision—

“Hail, oh! most high place, camp of Heaven and galloping-ground of angels! Here the Mightiest has set His pavilion of unspotted wool, enriched with crimson and gold. His door-posts are of onyx and His canopy is the firmament. To Him alone will I do homage for ever and ever!”

Then he told his fellows to prepare the brew of mare's milk that is called tarasun or arak, but they, having left their horses hidden below and having no milk with them, were at a loss.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

"Here I shall stay for a time," said Temudjin, "and, lest our enemies be waiting for us in ambush, let Belgutai and Chelmai and Boorchu go back into the forest to examine and discover. Do this very thoroughly, oh ! my brothers, taking no chances and spending more than a day. Kassar and Udjughen shall also go back to find the horses and tend them. One of them is a mare that will give us milk when she has fed and rested. Till you all return I shall remain in this place."

They left him alone for three days. Then being satisfied that the Merkits had departed, Belgutai, Chelmai and Boorchu brought him this knowledge and soon after Kassar and Udjughen joined them, carrying the liquor that they had distilled meanwhile.

They expected to find him weak and spent for want of food and believed that he would wish to make a feast and drink the tarasun to celebrate his escape. But Temudjin was as strong as ever and when he had greeted them he turned to the snowfield, over which the morning sun blazed in full glory. He loosed his girdle and put it on his back, he removed his cap and held it in his hand. Then striking his breast, he bent his knees and bowed his head nine times.

"Thanks be to Thee, oh ! God, for Thy salvation ! Thou hast answered my prayer, Thou hast rescued me from mine enemies., Thou hast driven those enemies away !

"Thanks be to Thee, oh ! God for Thy protection ! Thou hast held me in Thy hand, Thou hast sustained me in my need, Thou hast filled me with Thy spirit !

"Thanks be to Thee, oh ! God for all Thy gifts ! Thou hast brought back my friends, Thou hast not permitted my horses to stray. Thou keepest for me the love of Bortai !

"So nine times for these Thy favours do I worship

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Thæe, oh God, King of kings Omnipotent and Eternal,
Lord and Father, Ruler of Life, One and Indivisible,
Mightiest among the mighty ! ”

And when he had thus adored, Temudjin took the cup
of tarasun and poured it on the snow in a libation.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN Temudjin rejoined his mother and heard what had happened to Bortai, his wrath was terrible. His blue eyes seemed to shoot forth flames and the very hairs of his head seemed to bristle. He spoke no word to Hoelun, but his upper lip lifted to show his strong white teeth and he turned away from her presence and left her knowing that she had earned his contempt.

Though he continued to support her, he never afterwards consulted or considered her. She, to whom he had turned in his first distress, had now failed him. He had no use in his service for anyone he could not trust.

Straightway he called to his brothers and rode forth with them to the domain of Togrul.

He found the Khan of the Keraits encamped on the Tula with a great company of warriors and many herds. Among his tribe there were large numbers of priests and holy men, professing a faith, new to Temudjin, that had as its symbol the figure of a cross. These teachers and pilgrims came from Cathay, where the far-famed city of Kenjanfu¹ had been a centre of their religion (now overlaid by Buddhism) for close on four hundred years. There, surrounded by the splendid buildings which overhung the river Wei, above the water park enclosed by a wall thirty *li* in circumference and containing palaces set like jewels in the midst of lakes, tanks and canals, had been erected a tablet to commemorate

¹ The Mongol name for Si-gnan-fu.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

the early visit of a Rabban or monk, who arrived from Ta Ts'in¹ in the West, bringing sacred books and images.

This Rabban had claimed as his teacher one Nestorius, a Patriarch of Constantinople, and his doctrine had won the favour of the reigning emperor of the T'ang dynasty, who had caused many temples to be built for its observance, but the older faith, more acceptable to the East, had afterwards prevailed.

The Nestorians, established in the west, had won converts among many tribes and notably among the Uigurs, who were intellectually ahead of the others, but though their activities were known to the Mongols, Temudjin's isolation had kept him in ignorance. Now he heard for the first time how Kenjanfu, that fair city, had, in the opinion of the Nestorians, fallen from her high estate. Now too he saw for the first time that figure of a cross which was held by them in great esteem, as a symbol of their religion.

With Oriental disregard of time, he delayed his mission to Togrul and stayed to listen to a white-robed Chinese priest who called himself a bishop and appeared anxious to expound the significance of this symbol.

"Know, oh wanderer from afar, that ours is the sign of the one and only true God, from Whose ways man has in error departed."

Temudjin nodded. He knew and worshipped the one God and was aware of the error of humanity. Yet to his mind the sign of the Mightiest was written large on the universe, rather than in the circumscribed form that surmounted the priest's staff.

"It hath the aspect of a man with arms outstretched," he said.

"Ay, verily, for it is the emblem of our redemption.

¹ Great China, the Chinese name for the Roman Empire.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

God so loved the world that he sent his son to the people of Judea in the west when Judea was under the suzerainty of Ta Ts'in."

"This son of Heaven was then a great man : a notable ruler ? Did he rebel against Ta Ts'in ?"

"He was born in humble circumstances and by his divine nature he was the last of all prophets and the foremost of all teachers. Hear and understand, oh seeker after truth. In him who was called Jesus, the Christ, expected of his people, there were two persons, one of the Divine Word, the other of manhood, and the former dwelt in the latter as in a temple, or was united with the latter as fire with iron. And this is the doctrine of Nestorius, who for its setting forth, was deposed from his see by the Council of Ephesus, which held unjustly that on this point he had departed from the faith. The followers of Jacob Baradaeus, whose patriarch is at Mosul in the west, and who are called Jacobins, believe wrongly that Jesus had only one nature and that divine."

"It is clear," agreed Temudjin, "that if the son of Heaven lived on earth as a mortal he must have had two natures."

"Indubitably clear. And clearer still that the Jacobins and all who believe as they do, are wilfully mistaken. But fall not into error yourself, young man, in calling Jesus the son of Heaven. For this is the title, reserved by the ignorant for the Sung Emperor reigning in the south, on whom be peace. Jesus was the son of God, the Father, Whose abode is Heaven."

"We mean the same," said Temudjin, impatient of nice distinctions. "Heaven has had more than one son. I, myself, am of that family, and therefore readier to understand the divine nature. Tell me more of this elder brother, this Christ. Did he gain a great dominion ?"

"The dominion of his word stretches now from one end of the world even unto the other—from Ta Ts'in even unto

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Chung Tu.¹ His worship is established in the east and can never fail." (The Chinese bishop was inclined to be sanguine. Christianity in Asia was already tottering on its throne—a strange fact for the consideration of modern enterprise.) "By his grace," continued the Nestorian, "we increase and multiply and by his sign we conquer. His own people rose against him and delivered him to the power of Ta Ts'in, which caused him to suffer death upon the cross."

"How was that? Had he offended?"

"In no way. He was a just man, made perfect by the fire within him. He went about doing good. He died, in great torment, by the method of crucifixion, his hands and feet being nailed to wooden beams and his body being thus raised to hang on high. And this he endured willingly to reconcile man with God."

"That was basely done—a punishment more cruel than the kang. Did not God strike down the enemies of his son?"

"Afterwards He scattered the people of Judea, and a few of them still wander in Cathay without honour or glory. Also He took revenge on Ta Ts'in so that their power is no more."

"But at the time—had Jesus no friends to fight for him and support him?"

"A few poor peasants, without authority—no more."

"Strange, strange," muttered Temudjin. Then he clenched his hand. "Had I been there, even alone, he should not have died so! A just man, unjustly tormented to death! I would have hewn down the cross, I would have slain his enemies. I would have set him on my own horse!"

"Son, your courage would not have availed against the will of God. Yet listen and learn. Though men could

¹ Peking, the middle or northern capital of the Kin Emperors.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

kill the body and destroy the temple, they had no power to touch the divine spirit. Jesus descended into the grave. On the third day he rose again in the flesh and was seen of his followers and was caught up into Heaven, where he reigns now with the Father. Believe this, and you are saved. Believe this and you shall be washed with water and called by a new name in a ceremony called baptism, which shall place you in the company of the elect."

"The name I received from my father is good enough for me, and I have no desire to be washed with water," said Temudjin. "You speak strange things, sir, and I shall ponder them in my mind. A dead man, buried three days, came back to life! That is not possible! Yet God can do all things. And in His wrath He may have performed this miracle. You say Jesus was seen by his friends. Perhaps they were deceived. The word of men who would not fight to rescue their leader cannot be trusted."

"Nay, youth, you speak without reverence. These were wise and holy men, knowing the will of God. Among them was one John, the friend whom Jesus loved. He wrote the word we preach, and so excelled in literature that, being afterwards banished to a lonely island called Patmos, he produced a rare poem of revelation, worthy to rank with our classics. Thus inspired, he was promised by God, that he should never taste death."

"Then he is still living?"

"As priest and king he controls a mighty empire,¹ and letters describing his glory circulate in the land. According to these, his wealth is indescribable. His sceptre is an emerald and strange creatures wander in his dominions—wild men and horned men, men with eyes before and behind,

¹ It has been plausibly suggested that the title of Prester John was connected with the legends of the immortality of John the Apostle."—*Yule*.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

giants and pygmies and eaters of human flesh. His country is also the home of the elephant, the camel, the crocodile, the panther, the wild ass, the white and red lion and the white bear, together with centaurs, fauns and satyrs. All this we know from the writings of Presbyter John himself, since these writings are published abroad.”¹

“I seem to have heard already of this friend of God,” said Temudjin. “Where is he to be found?”

The Chinese bishop shook his head and held out his hands. “No man knows, for he is as the wind, which can be felt but not seen. He is surrounded by people, who, having heard his word, profess the true faith, but his movements are clothed in mystery.”

“Then he was not Yelui Tashi of Kara Khitai, the great conqueror?”

“Many have ruled in his name and their power has waned, as his can never do. He is called Unc Khan and by that title he must be sought.”

The white-robed priests whispered together and appeared to have some deep secret between them.

“It is doubtful that he was the friend of Jesus,” said one. “Rather he is of the race of certain wise men, who came to pay homage to the son of God, when He was born on earth.”

“It is written,” said another, “that Jesus promised to revisit the world, and Presbyter John is the forerunner of His second coming.”

“When all accept the Christian faith, the empire of John will be prepared for his Master.”

“I will certainly find him,” said Temudjin, “and he shall tell me the truth. Togrul, your Khan, will know more of this matter.”

¹ “By the circulation of these letters, glaring forgeries and fictions as they are, the idea of the great Christian conqueror was planted in the mind of the European nations,”—*Ibid.*

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

At the mention of Togrul's name the excitement and the mystification seemed to increase.

"The Khan's spirit is not yet awake. He does not yet realise verity. The time is not yet come when his secret power can be proclaimed."

"What is the secret?" cried Temudjin.

"That," they answered, "can only be learned with patience and with seeking. Go your way, son, and keep your own counsel, speaking to no man of these things for a season."

Togrul, Khan of the Keraites, had not yet yielded to the persuasions of Nestorian Christianity, though the greater number of his people professed the faith. Before his tribe rose to power and while the Keraites were still conducting inconspicuous forays against their neighbours, his grandfather, Markuz Buyurak, had been captured by a Tartar chieftain called Naur, who, being in league with the Kin Emperor, had sent him to the latter's court, where he had been tortured to death. In revenge, the widow of Markuz had set out to do feigned homage to Naur. With her she had taken one hundred sheep and ten mares, also one hundred large cowskins, supposed to contain distilled mare's milk, but in reality holding concealed one hundred armed warriors. A feast had straightway been held and, in the night time, these warriors had come out and slain Naur and all his household.

The resourceful lady had four sons, the youngest of whom, Kurja Kuz, was the father of Togrul. When the uncles and cousins of Togrul tried to assume authority, Togrul, inheriting his granddam's ferocity, slew all but the eldest uncle, Gurkhan, who fled, allied himself with the Naimans, and returning, drove out Togrul and made himself ruler. Then Togrul with a few followers sought help of Yessagai

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

and reinstated by him became his sworn friend or "anda." This was the man whose power had now increased enormously, and whose presence Temudjin now approached with reverence inspired by a sense of mystery.

How did the mystery of Prester John arise ?

It was at first due, probably in part, to the ambition of the early church, which, urged by the proselytising instinct, sought to establish an oriental empire greater than that of Rome. Whenever an eastern ruler stood out as a strong and forceful character, missionary enterprise sought in him the reigning priest, and the legend of Prester John found a new figure head. The strange fantasy which traced this Christian potentate (who never actually materialised) to the race of the Magi, and even, it was whispered, attempted to identify him with St. John the Divine, only shows how far human imagination may reach.

But again, how did the myth arise ?

To ascribe it to ambition or to superstition is not to gauge the impulses of human nature, which at their strongest are not self-seeking. Universal credulity in the figure of Prester John, which makes of his name a question to this day, argues a faith in his personality, a demand for the fulfilment of the idea, which had somehow to be supplied. And it *was* supplied, in such diverse and inappropriate characters of history and with such a wealth of invented detail, that presently the demand sickened and died.

Yet still the myth persisted and still the figure of Prester John arouses curiosity. Failing his identification with an actual personality how can this be ?

No man knew him, for he was "as the wind which can be felt but not seen."

Here then was his origin : he represented an idea, a concept of the mind ; the idea of a mystical power as necessary and natural to humanity as Life or Fellowship.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

He was the desire of men and his alliance was what they sought. It was felt that he was supported by Fellowship and that he must have been born of Wisdom. He was immortal, he was rich beyond all dreams, he was generous, he was honourable. And though he might be called Prester John, Priest-King, the name of the spirit he stood for was Courage.

The encampment of Togrul Khan was the largest and most magnificent that Temudjin had ever seen. The clustering yurts covered several miles of territory, on the bank of the Tula river, and there were enormous numbers of horses, cattle, sheep and camels. The place hummed with activity like a busy city. In one part were the tents of the falconers and near them were kept all the animals used for the chase, leopards, panthers and dogs, which filled the air with the noise of snarling and barking. In another part was the armoury, where all the weapons of war were piled together, bows and sheaves of arrows without number, lances, swords and daggers. Countless carts and camel carriages occupied yet further space, and their crowding owners seemed to have been drawn hither from every tribe in the country.

Uigurs and Naimans from the south and south-east, men of Kara Khitai, originally from the north of China and now established as a separate people on the western frontier of Mongolia, pale-skinned Tangutans from the lower edge of the Gobi desert, yellow-skinned sons of Han from the Sung empire, dark-skinned cousins from Tibet, all mingled fraternally together with the actual Keraits.

The northern people excelled in strength and stature. Many of their men might have been called giants, in comparison with the bow-legged and stunted horsemen of the plains, who, galloping hither and thither could well have

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

been taken for centaurs, but when they held their wrestling matches on some hilltop apart, or practised their archery in some open space, had rather the aspect of savages. The swarming children, stark naked and brown in the sun, or clothed in a brief rag and a bright necklace of beads, might certainly have been the pygmies of Prester John's letters.

Among the herds some wild asses of the desert stampeded. An unhappy white bear, evidently brought as tribute to the Khan from the snow land beyond Baikal, was chained to a post on the river brink, and tried to regain his native element by furtively dipping his paws into the water.

All these things Temudjin noticed and pondered in his mind.

The royal pavilion of white felt, decorated with red and blue cloth cut in a fantastic pattern, stood in the centre of the encircling yurts. Facing it a watchful crowd was drawn into a semi-circle at a respectful distance. Beneath a canopy of gaily embroidered stuff, erected on poles of bamboo, was a daïs covered with furs, on which sat a man of middle age, who gave his absorbed attention to two jugglers or necromancers who performed before him.

These men were Shamanist witch doctors, in whose craft Togrul delighted. They wore shirts of yellow buckskin adorned with streamers of multi-coloured tape, and as they moved they droned a weird chant to the accompaniment of a drum, beaten by a boy crouching on the ground.

Behind the daïs stood armed warriors, dressed in leather, men of fierce visage, the generals and captains who enjoyed the Khan's favour. And grouped further in the background were the women of his household, his wives, concubines, daughters and nieces, chattering together like birds.

The Khan's countenance was round in contour, impassive in expression. Long, drooping moustaches depended from his upper lip. His small and very bright

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

black eyes, beneath the sloping lids, lent vivacity to a face that was otherwise rather sheep-like. He wore a long coat of soft leather faced with crimson brocade, over which several strings of large baroque pearls hung incongruously down to his breast. His close-fitting leather cap was adorned with a black heron plume fastened with a clasp of rubies and turquoise.

To him in his regal state came Temudjin, poor and unattended, except by his few devoted comrades, wonder-struck by all he saw, yet preserving his dignity with a heart unafraid. Announced, he stood before the Khan of the Keraits and saluted him.

"Oh ! King and father, I come to claim the help you promised me when I sent you a cloak of sable. The Merkits fell on my people suddenly and stole my wife, Bortai. Lend me your aid to save her."

A smile illumined Togrul's face. He dismissed the jugglers with a wave of one hand and beckoned with the other to Temudjin, that he should sit beside him.

"Why did you not come sooner, oh son of mine anda, Yessagai ? Did not I swear to bring back to you your people who are scattered and have not I yearned this long while to fulfil my oath ? Dear are you to me, Temudjin, and from henceforth I will regard you as my own son."

The warmth of this reception completely won Temudjin. Accustomed to fight for bare existence, he regarded such kindness as something divine and was ready to fall at Togrul's feet.

"I will root out and destroy the Merkits," continued the Khan. "I will rescue and return to you your wife. We will fight together and Jamuka, chief of the Juriats, who is your cousin, shall join us when we send him a message. Two tumans¹ of warriors will go with me and Jamuka will

¹ A tuman is ten thousand.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

provide the same number. Now let us consult the necromancers, who by the divination of arrows shall inform us of the outcome of our battle."

The Shamanist witch doctors advanced again to demonstrate their skill. But now the Nestorian priests, with whom Temudjin had spoken, came forward and asked that they should have their turn.

"What say you, my son? Shall we see first what they can do?"

"These are wise men," said Temudjin. "I had speech with them on my way hither, at the outskirts of your encampment and found them full of knowledge. By your leave, oh Khan, let them show their power."

Sulkily the Shamanists withdrew and looked on, while the white-robed bishop took two arrows and explained to the assembled company that one represented the allied forces of Togrul and Jamuka, fighting for Temudjin, and the other represented the army of the Merkits.

"The arrows will be laid side by side on the ground. By the power of the Holy Name, with no man touching them one shall rise and overtop the other. So it will be seen which is ordained to be the conqueror."

The preparations were made. The Nestorians fell on their knees and prayed. The bishop alone remained erect and raised his arms to Heaven, while he recited in a fierce monotone some incantation in a foreign tongue. But for this sound, a curious stillness reigned, like the hush before a storm.

Then, was it fancy, was it suggestion, was it a miracle? It seemed to Temudjin and to all who watched with him, that one arrow did move, slowly, uncertainly, as though raised by a trembling of the earth. It was shaken, it fell back, it quivered again. Finally it dropped across the other arrow and came to rest above it.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

"Togrul wins! The arrows have shown it! The army of our Khan triumphs! Long life to Togrul and Temudjin!"

The shouts of enthusiasm rose on every side.

"Truly," said Togrul, "these Nestorians are well informed. I shall inquire further into their faith."

"It is at least one that should be tolerated," said Temudjin, "for it appears reasonable and without doubt these men know the will of Heaven."

Jamuka, chief of the Juriats, was willing to join forces with Togrul and Temudjin. In his company were some of those Mongols who had deserted Yessagai's family, and now chose to serve under a new leader. An appointment was made for the allied armies to meet at a certain place called Butohan Jorchi, but the Khan of the Keraits failed in punctuality by three days. When they came together at last, Jamuka was angry at the delay.

"You have not abided by your word," he said to Togrul. "The time of our meeting was settled and the conditions of our alliance have not been fulfilled. In this you have shown me scant respect."

Here was a character after Temudjin's own heart, proud, fearless, honest, caring for nothing except discipline and the bond of the given word.

He saw a man only a few years his senior, comely and ruddy of countenance and slight in build. And he felt drawn towards Jamuka as a friend closer than any other. The feeling was apparently reciprocated. The outward aspect of the two showed a striking contrast. Temudjin swarthy, square shouldered, strong with the grace of a wild beast and poorly accoutred. Jamuka, pale-skinned, slim, handsome and richly apparelled. Temudjin gave Jamuka his heart-whole admiration and finding it accepted and returned with fair words, he loved Jamuka with a love

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

passing the love of woman. They swore eternal friendship and became andas to one another, promising to share bed and board and having one life between them. The ancient ceremony which cemented the bond took a strange form. Each man in the presence of witnesses opened a vein in his arm, let the blood flow into a cup, mixed it with kumiss and drank half.

Togrul accepted the reproaches of Jamuka with a humility that showed his modesty.

Temudjin was now very happy. Not only had he found an affinity, but also a benefactor whom he revered for his spiritual qualities. The allied armies set forth and by night attacked the camp of the Merkits and took large numbers of prisoners, among them the wife of the chieftain. Him they might have captured as well, but, warned in time, he fled with many of his followers along the Selinga river. This flight, however, amounted to a rout, and they were hotly pursued by Togrul's men, led by Temudjin, who shouted as a battle cry, "Bortai, oh ! Bortai !"

The crowd rushed on through the darkness. Shouts and yells filled the air. But loud above the clamour sounded Temudjin's voice, "Bortai, oh ! Bortai !"

Suddenly two women leapt from a small moving cart. The elder of them, who was Hoakchin, crouched down and hid. The younger ran swiftly amid the galloping horses and caught one by the bridle.

"Temudjin, oh ! Temudjin, here am I !"

The moon broke through the clouds at that moment and revealed her face.

He caught her up on his saddle bow, his love, his dear. He left the fray, holding her in his arms.

The stars, shining through the cloud wrack, seemed to run over the field of heaven, like torch bearers, lighting the way to a marriage feast.

CHAPTER VII

THREE hundred Merkits were slain in the rescue of Bortai and their wives were enslaved or taken by new husbands. Temudjin, reunited with his beloved, was content with this victory and desired no further vengeance against the ravishers. He was aware that Bortai had been taken by one Chilgu, a younger brother of that coward Yeke Chilaidu who had originally lost Hoelun to Yessagai, and perhaps he did not wish to continue the vendetta. In any case, he informed Togrul and Jamuka that his work in this direction was now accomplished.

But the event had a strange sequel. It was soon evident that Bortai was with child and when, during the same year, a son was born to her, Temudjin looked on it with justifiable doubt. The chastity of their wives is a strong point with all Mongols and, in regarding Bortai as the victim of mischance, Temudjin showed himself superior to the law of his race. Against his conviction he accepted the child as his own and called it Juchi after his brother Juchi-Kassar.

"It is a lusty brat and should do well," he said gravely. "Dai-sensen told me that I was over young to be the father of strong sons, but there is time for that and meanwhile I can be good to this one."

Such extraordinary generosity and consideration endeared him further to Bortai and they continued to love each other well. No other woman was ever the equal of his first wife in Temudjin's affections. To the end she remained his inspiration, his mate and his friend and though, like all Mongols, he was a devoted parent, it is evident from the

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

impartiality he showed to young Juchi and to his own sons later, that he loved them chiefly as the children of Bortai.

When they had parted from Togrul, Temudjin and Jamuka renewed their vows of comradeship and discussing the bonds between them, confirmed it by the exchange of rich gifts. Temudjin girded Jamuka with a golden belt which he had taken from the Merkits, and Jamuka presented Temudjin with a jewelled girdle and a splendid white stallion. They slept under one blanket and lived together in glad and care-free fellowship for eighteen months.

At last one night Temudjin was roused from sleep by the sound of his friend's unconscious muttering. In the darkness he raised himself on his elbow and listened. Jamuka stirred and flung out an arm.

"What troubles you, oh ! my anda ?" said Temudjin softly. But he knew as he spoke that Jamuka's eyes were still closed in slumber. Then came the paralysing shock.

In the hurried tones of sleep Jamuka cried aloud, "We have the wolf cub, oh ! Targutai ! Now let us strike him down !"

Could any words have been more bitter ? They dispelled the dream of perfect fellowship. They proved that Jamuka was false and that a plot was afoot between him and Temudjin's oldest and deadliest enemy.

Temudjin did not wake Jamuka, but he lay down again and turned his face to the wall.

Next day, the season being Spring, they moved from their winter camping ground and as the two young men rode ahead of the khibitkas, Jamuka made a remark that seemed to indicate his desire to take a different direction from that which had been agreed.

"If we camp near the mountain," he said, "our yurts will be in danger of marauding tribes, but if we camp on the low ground near the river, we shall get food in plenty."

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

As the highland undoubtedly offered the safest stronghold and the best summer pasture, his argument carried no weight, and Temudjin, remembering his words in the night, made no answer, but turned back to the foremost khibitka which carried Hoelun and Bortai.

While Jamuka rode on, he told them what had happened. Bortai replied quickly—

“Your friend wearies of us. There is treachery in his speech. Let us not halt, but continue speedily by a new road. It is best to part in good health from Jamuka.”

“You are wise, oh ! Bortai,” said Temudjin.

He followed her advice and proceeding along the river bank they passed a camp of Taidjuts, which confirmed their suspicions, for these men would certainly have taken any opportunity to attack them unawares, but being themselves surprised by the advance, they rose up and hurried off to join Jamuka.

When Temudjin had settled in a new place, many of Jamuka's own people, the Jelairs, came to him with vows of allegiance. Presently also came Horchi of the Barin clan, to whom Temudjin's future supremacy had been revealed in a dream.

Four other clans followed, all having deserted Jamuka for one whom they felt was the better man. And many thousands having thus surrounded him, they proclaimed him their Khan and the title, to which he had clung through the weary years, was at last consummated.

He was now not only Khan in name, but Khan in fact, ruler and law giver in the land of the four upper rivers. Yet in the first days of his greatness he did not forget his comrades, and his relegation of appointments proved his unerring judgment.

Boorchu, who had helped him to find his stolen horses, was given charge of his bows and his quiver with four new

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

friends. Three others were made masters of nourishment, to disperse food and drink. There was also a master of shepherds, a master of khibitkas, a master of servants, and a master of herds. Juchi-Kassar, his brother, with three satellites became sword bearer. Belgutai and two more became masters of horse training. Messengers were also appointed "to be like near or distant arrows"—that is to say, they were to hold themselves in readiness, as in a quiver, to be dispatched in any direction.

Then, out of that assembly, a little lad, hardly six years old, ran forward, young Subotai of the Uriankhai tribe, the forest dwellers and keepers of reindeer.

"Use me, oh ! Khan," he cried. "I will be like an old mouse in snatching, I will be like a jackdaw in speed, I will be like a saddlecloth to hide things, I will ward off every enemy as felt wards off wind ! That is what I shall be for you !"

There was such purpose and such fire in his words that Temudjin, remembering his own boyhood, smiled.

"Truly," he said, "I foresee in you a great warrior. You shall be known as Subotai the valiant."

As the Khan had promised, Boorchu and Chelmai stood first in his council. To the rest he said, "I declare that as long as Heaven upholds me, you shall share my fortune."

And he instructed them personally in all their duties, leaving nothing to chance.

Togrul approved of Temudjin's accession to power and Jamuka, to whom he sent messages announcing the fact, returned a flattering reply which cloaked the falsity of his heart. Soon after indeed, Jamuka allied himself openly with Targutai and the Taidjuts, on the excuse of one of those vendettas which constantly engaged the Mongols. Jamuka's younger brother had stolen some horses belonging to a slave

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

of Temudjin. The slave had retaliated by killing the thief. Temudjin had therefore to be called to account for the crime of his servant.

With thirty thousand warriors Jamuka and Targutai attacked Temudjin's force of thirteen thousand. By superior strategy, Temudjin gained his second and most signal victory in a bloody battle. After the encounter, he led his men into the depths of a dark forest and here he selected from the prisoners those he considered most worthy of punishment.

Jamuka and Targutai had escaped; but among the captives was Todoyan, who had helped to entice away Yessagai's people. Among them also was the murderer of the old man Charaha and those who had refused to listen to Hoelun, when she had pursued them with the standard. Temudjin saw again the faces that had mocked him when he had been captured and the kang put on his shoulders. He saw again those who had attempted to break his spirit with torture. And the vengeance he took was terrible. There in the forest he caused eighty large cauldrons filled with water to be slung on hooks over fiercely blazing fires, and in each of these cauldrons he placed one of his enemies and boiled them alive.

The shadowed space was lit with a ruddy glow. Ghastly shrieks resounded in the air. From the horror and fury of that scene, the clean spirit of the wild seemed to shrink away abashed. Merciless in its own way, it could not touch the vindictiveness of a human soul.

Yet when such barbarous methods are condemned it is well to remember that they were as little peculiar to one century or to one country as to the leadership of one man. Tortures equally appalling were not only condoned in Europe at the same time, but were carried on there to later periods.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Through all the ages, human hate has shown itself more cruel than Nature, and must so continue. In every land and every clime the instinct to prove power by the infliction of suffering on the enemy only awaits the cause ; the difference of treatment is a matter of imagination, never a matter of degree.

The boiling continued until all whom Temudjin had reason to hate were dead. He acted with the coolest deliberation and like a judge without apparent rancour.

Meanwhile he continued to heap favours on his friends and to treat them with the utmost consideration, trusting them and confirming their responsibilities. In consequence, fear and hope brought many new adherents to his side and notably more of the Jelairs whose land adjoined his own.

Encountering these tribesmen in the forest, Temudjin gave them meat and finding themselves so well treated, they left their own territory and came over to his side for a time.

Munlik, the son of Charaha, who had cursed the boy for receiving Charaha's last blessing, now joined him as well. Many years had passed and Munlik was the father of seven strong sons. Strange fate that brought him back to the family of Yessagai ! He looked on Hoelun and found her still beautiful. Then, though he had already two wives, he asked her in marriage and the union was fulfilled, cementing his alliance with Temudjin.

Temudjin now turned his attention to the Buyar Lake Tartars, who had murdered his father.

The year was 1193, and his age was thirty-two. For more than a decade he had lived in the utmost hardship. Then he had slowly begun to establish his power, till now he was indeed started on his mighty career.

Bortai had meanwhile removed the reproach of her first

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

son Juchi, by presenting him successively with three other sons, Ogotai, Jagatai and Tului.

At this time the Kin Emperor¹ ruled the north of Cathay contemporaneously with the great native dynasty of the Sung which ruled the south. Feeling himself threatened by marauding tribes on his frontier and chiefly by the Buyur Lake Tartars, who refused to pay tribute, he sent his minister Wang Kin with an army against them.

Now came Temudjin's opportunity to revenge himself on these personal enemies, while pretending that his motive was to help the Golden Khan. Once more he invited aid from Togrul, who responded promptly with a large force. They fell on the Tartars, whose retreat was cut off by the Kin army in their rear, and defeating them, put their leader to death and took an enormous amount of booty, among other things a cradle built of solid silver covered with a cloth of gold.

Wang Kin was gratified by this victory, which had indeed saved him the trouble of the offensive. In reporting it to his master he took to himself the credit of having inspired it, but meanwhile he loaded Temudjin with compliments and bestowed on Togrul the title of Wang, which signifies Prince.

On hearing his old friend so flattered with this resonant name, Temudjin was reminded of the secret whisperings of the Nestorian missionaries. He, who was acclaimed as King by one so near to the oldest civilization on earth, might well become the priest of a younger civilization. It only remained for Togrul to accept the faith he was still considering, but already in Temudjin's mind, he and no other must be the far famed potentate Prester John, hiding

¹ The Golden Khan, so called from the name of his dynasty Altan = golden, in contradistinction to the previous ~~Li~~Liao = iron, from which came the Khitans.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

as yet for his own reasons the full revelation of his glory. Temudjin, however, kept this discovery to himself. He had still to deal with other enemies.

His great grandfather, Kabul Khan, had had seven sons. Of these the second, Bartan, was the father of Yessagai, but the eldest, Okin Barka, had collected as his attendants, noted champions in archery, who came to be known as the Churkis. These Churkis had now formed themselves into a separate tribe and they attacked Temudjin's people, but were speedily routed and ruined by the new Khan.

Kabul's third son Munlair was the father of Buri Buga, who, while pretending to support Temudjin, remained independant at heart and had been a comrade of the champions. He was a strong wrestler and Temudjin, distrusting him, took advantage of the Mongols' favourite sport to cause his undoing. He commanded Belgutai and Buri Buga to wrestle before him.

The match took place on a hill top and a large cheese was offered as a prize. A crowd collected to watch. All knew that Buri Buga was the stronger man and that he could hold Belgutai in a paralysing grip. But this time they received a surprise. Almost immediately Buri Buga feigned to be beaten and fell with his face to the earth under Belgutai. The latter flashed a glance at Temudjin and received his orders in a sign. Next instant, he put his knee on Buri Buga's back and seizing his neck in both hands, broke the spinal cord.

"Not your strength, but my fear has beaten me," whispered the dying man. "I thought to propitiate the Khan, by assuming weakness. Now I know that Temudjin requires truth and power together."

He might have said that Temudjin required truth alone in others. Power he wanted only for himself.

Believing in the spiritual destiny of Togrul, it was nothing

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

to him when later Wang Khan (as he must now be called) quarrelled with his brother Kushluk of the Naimans and was driven out of his own territory. Wang Khan sought help first from the Uigurs, but failed to find it. His position and that of Temudjin were now reversed. His were poverty and wretchedness, incompatible certainly with any idea of Prester John. Temudjin's seemed likely to be the empire of the East.

Yet Temudjin was ready to aid his old benefactor. He gave Wang Khan cattle and held a feast for him ; their alliance was formally renewed and they became as father and son to one another.

Temudjin must have still been upheld at this time by his belief in the identification of Prester John. From the teaching of Christian missionaries, he could have found no incongruity in the fact that this noted figure should, like his Master and Friend, for a time be despised and rejected of men. To his simple mind, moreover, Wang Khan's hesitancy to embrace Christianity openly (which continued for several more years) was no obstacle to the idea.

Christianity was for Temudjin only one of many doctrines, all of which he was prepared to tolerate, as setting forth one aspect of the truth

Fighting together in 1197, Temudjin and Wang Khan defeated the Barins and the Merkits and the young conqueror allowed his ally to keep all the booty taken. But the ruler of the Keraites was not the equal of his friend in generosity. The following year, undertaking another and independent attack on the Merkits, he kept for himself everything he captured, without giving a share to Temudjin, whose previous help had made the victory possible.

Next they attacked the Naimans ; Kushluk fled and the remaining chieftains were defeated and captured. One

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

commander held on with a large force in a chosen position. The allies delayed their offensive till morning and Jamuka, who lurked near by like a jackal, waiting some opportunity to injure Temudjin, chose this chance to make Wang Khan believe that teachery was afoot and his friend was in league with the Naimans.

Wang Khan promptly withdrew his forces and Temudjin thus deserted was obliged to abandon the fight.

The Naiman commander pursued Wang, who sent his eldest son Sengun to meet him, and shamelessly appealed once more to Temudjin for assistance.

"This time I shall not go myself," said Temudjin. "But none shall say that I do not keep faith. Therefore I will despatch my four heroes, Boorchu, Mukuli, Boroul and Jilaun with their men to render aid."

So he did, and by forced marches the relieving troops reached the battle ground just in time.

Wang's army had been broken and his son was seeking escape on a wounded stallion. Boorchu gave Sengun his own horse and took for himself the gray steed that Temudjin had given him as a mark of favour—a beast of high spirit this, which had never been struck with a whip, but responding to the touch of a hand on his mane, flew into action like a sudden wind. The Naimans were routed and Wang expressed his gratitude.

Temudjin, however, wanted more than words to cement the new pact of friendship. He went to visit his ally on the Tula and thus expressed himself.

"You and I cannot live without each other, oh! my father, for we are both still threatened by many enemies. Tell me, who is most worthy to be called your elder son, Sengun who could not support you in the hour of your greatest need, or I who have the blood of Yessagai in my veins, yet have treated you as though this blood were yours?"

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Then Wang Khan formally adopted Temudjin as his heir excluding Sengun, who indignantly carried his grievance to Jamuka.

"Henceforth we will always fight together," said the old Khan to his new son. "None shall come between us or separate us, for we shall have perfect confidence in one another."

With power established, they marched against the Taidjuts who remained under the leadership of Targutai and crushed them completely in a great battle on the edge of the Gobi desert. Targutai himself was slain by Jilaun, one of the four heroes, who was no less a person than the son of Sorgan Shira and had originally helped to hide Temudjin in the cart of woolsacks.

The last of the Taidjuts joined the Katkins and Saljuts and Temudjin sent envoys to them inviting their allegiance on generous terms. But the envoys were beaten and insulted and the entrails of beasts were thrown in their faces.

Then these tribesmen, imbued with hatred and folly, made common cause with the Jelairs, the Durbans, the Kinkurats and Tartars against Temudjin and sacrificed to Heaven a stallion, a bull, a dog, a ram and a he-goat to consecrate their vow of vengeance.

The blood of their victims availed little to save the shedding of their own. A portion of them were scattered like dust. The rest chose Jamuka for their Khan and renewed their vows.

Now they plotted to take Temudjin by surprise and murder him. The plan was overheard by a man called Kuridai, who wiser than the others, realised Temudjin's greatness and decided to warn him. Kuridai rode off, was captured by a sentry and won this comrade to his purpose. He continued on a fresh horse, was pursued by some of Jamuka's

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

men and outdistanced them. Eventually he reached Temudjin with his message and was richly rewarded.

Temudjin armed his men and joined by Wang fell unawares on Jamuka's forces near the Kerulon. The Shamanist sorcerers in the Jelair camp raised wind and water against the allies. But Feng-shui¹ could not act in opposition to the favour of Heaven. The storm changed its direction. An icy blast blew in Jamuka's face and his men were blinded with snow. The sky was darkened and the ground was full of pitfalls.

Jamuka withdrew, followed hotly by Wang, while Temudjin pursued another detachment. At last he came up with them and forced a desperate encounter. All day the battle raged. Suddenly Temudjin was struck by an arrow in the neck and fell to the ground as though dead. Secretly and hastily his attendants carried him to a tent.

He did not regain consciousness till midnight. The first person he saw was his comrade Chelmai, who kneeled beside him and offered him drink out of a bowl. Temudjin took the cup and eagerly quaffed its contents. Then he drew three deep breaths, as though all he desired of life was air. Finally, he sat up.

"I am better. That tasted like milk. Where did you find milk, oh ! Chelmai ?"

"When you fell, oh ! Khan, I did not believe you killed. I knew that the first thing needful for you would be nourishing food, of which we have no store. Therefore, when night increased the darkness of the clouds, I stripped myself naked and greased my body and thus rendering myself slippery as a snake I stole into the camp of the Jelairs to seek milk. I found no milk, but I discovered a bowl full of cream. This I took and mixed it with water and this is what you have drunk."

¹ Magic, literally "wind-water" in Chinese.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Chelmai sat back on his haunches and gazed at his master with the look of an intelligent and devoted dog.

"If the Jelairs had caught you," said Temudjin, "what would you have done?"

"If I had failed to slip through their hands, I would have told them that I wished to surrender to them, but that you had seized me and stripped me and were about to kill me, when I sprang away and ran to them for refuge. Having gained their confidence, I should then have stolen a horse and ridden back to you."

Temudjin smiled. The first rays of dawn came through the door flap of the tent. In the dim light, he saw a pool of congealing blood on the ground beside his couch.

"What is that?" he said, pointing to it.

"Before I went to fetch milk," answered Chelmai, "I saw that you were likely to choke from the blood which had flowed from your neck and was stiffening in your throat. So I put my mouth to the wound and sucked it."

"You have saved my life. How shall I reward you oh! Chelmai, most faithful of friends?"

"I acted in great haste," said Chelmai simply. "I spat out much of the blood, but more I swallowed. Some of your blood has entered into my body. That is sufficient reward for me."

CHAPTER VIII

NEXT day Jamuka withdrew his forces. Temudjin hunted after them, and as he went he saw the figure of a woman in a red dress standing on a hillside and piercing the air with her cries. Behind her lay the smoking ruin of a burned yurt, at her feet was the body of a dead horse.

The Khan sent men to investigate her trouble, but she refused to go with them and would only shriek Temudjin's name.

Then he approached her and leaning from his horse said, "Here am I, woman? What do you want of me?"

She clung to his bridle and raised her face, distorted by grief. "My name is Kadan, lord, and I am a daughter of Sorgan Shira. Because my father served you once and because my brother serves you still, save my husband, whom the Jelairs cut down before they fled, knowing that he desired to serve you too."

"I owe a great debt to Sorgan Shira," said Temudjin, "and I will pay it to every member of his family."

His men searched the hillside and found the corpse of Kadan's husband with the head severed. They gave it honourable burial, delaying their pursuit for this purpose, and Temudjin treated the woman as his sister. A little later Sorgan Shira himself came to their camp.

"You are late, friend," said Temudjin whimsically. "Already your children are on my side."

"Had I followed the prompting of my heart and been

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

before them," said Sorgan Shira, "had I obeyed the behest of my old wife, who is now dead, none of them would have lived to join you."

"That was wisely considered," said Temudjin. "I can ill spare any of your family."

In the spring of 1203, Temudjin set forth on his own account against the North-Eastern Tartars, Tungusian tribesmen of Manchuria, who had their homes in the region of Buyur Lake and from among whom had come the murderers of Yessagai.

Temudjin's warriors were divided into sections of ten, each section with its commander. Nine chiefs or orloks elected a tenth as centurion and he had supervision over the hundred. Nine centurions again chose a battalion commandant, and ten of these were under a divisional commandant, who led an army of ten thousand, forming a tuman. Every soldier was obliged to pay his chief in a certain number of horses, cattle and pieces of felt a year, and when he was at war, his wife met these taxes.

Such was the law inaugurated by Temudjin, who, moreover, exhorted his chief commanders personally and periodically to seek his advice. While they were not engaged in a campaign, he compelled them to instruct their children in riding, archery and plunder, thus showing the value he ascribed to technical education.

He also explained his purpose as follows :

"To those who join courage to skill I give the command of troops. To those who are active and alert I confide the care of baggage. But to the dullards I will give a pole and make them tend the cattle."

So every man had his appointed work, carefully apportioned to suit his merits. And the leader who evolved this system out of chaos and knit a variety of warring tribes into

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

one disciplined people started from nought, without a preconceived standard as his guide. Greater than Alexander, greater than Napoleon, both of whom belonged to civilised communities, greater even than his great successor, Timur the Terrible, the natural genius of Temudjin is apt to be forgotten, when he is remembered only as a savage conqueror.

"He led armies like a god," said the Chinese, who had most reason to condemn him.

Each man of the army which now followed him carried, besides his bow, arrows and axe, a file to sharpen the points of his shafts, a sieve, an awl, needles and thread. A few picked troops were armed with curved sabres and all wore leather armour, covered with lacquered iron plates.

Their food was dried milk, and if this supply failed, they were in the habit of supporting life by cutting a vein in their horse's flanks and sucking the animal's blood.

Nothing could hinder forces so well equipped by nature as well as by design. They were indeed like centaurs, sharing the vitality and the strength of their steeds, swarthy, terrible and swift, with muscles of tempered steel and countenances of rock. In any engagement with the enemy, they avoided the direct charge of cavalry or a regular medley, but, preserving a close formation of their ranks, made encircling movements and shot showers of arrows into the mass of the foe. Then they would feign retreat, turning in the saddle and shooting as they went, doubling to and fro, and inspiring their disorganised opponents, who attempted to pursue, with terror, so that, when they presented finally a united front, the battle was practically won.

Their strength lay first in their mobility, secondly in the rigidity of a temperament that could not be daunted by any obstacles. When they came to a wide river, with no knowledge of engineering or boat building, they urged

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

their horses into the stream and clinging to their manes swam across, or flung before them skins inflated and sewn together on which they floated. When they came to a pathless ravine of fearful depth, they lashed their spears together with ropes of wood fibre and so formed a bridge, strong enough to support the whole army across the yawning chasm.

The Manchurian tribesmen, subjects of Wangtshuk and Tshagan, lived in large communities of wooden or mud houses, roofed with thatch and surrounded with high walls. Temudjin found himself before the chief city, which contained seventy thousand dwellings, and having no engines of war, proceeded to lay siege to it. Large trees were cut down and used as battering rams and a rough machine for slinging large stones was constructed and worked by a number of men who hauled the ropes attached to it. The inhabitants put up a brave defence, but at last hunger and the fury of the attack obliged them to sue for terms.

Wangtshuk sent a message to Temudjin :

“We have little wealth to tempt you and only desire to live in peace. Tell us what will satisfy you and we will try to fulfil your demands.”

Temudjin, well informed by his spies of the actual wealth of the city and remembering the fate of his father, answered :

“Far be it from me to show myself extortionate or to fail in generosity to any suppliant. Send me, oh ! Wangtshuk, ten thousand swallows from the eaves of your houses and one thousand cats from the homes of your people, in mere token of surrender and I will cease from attacking.”

Loud was the expression of relief in the city.

Louder still the laughter in the Mongol camp.

The swallows were brought out, fluttering in wooden cages. The cats were driven forth from the principal gate, a whole army of cats, lean, frightened, mewling aloud, carry-

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

ing their tails erect, eager for food. What scurrying to and fro followed as they were caught and carried to a safe place !

Night descended. The truce prevailed. Suddenly the darkness was lit with a myriad points of fire—little flames that flew through the air, little flames that fled along the ground.

Temudjin's soldiers had attached tufts of lighted wool to the tails of the innocent birds and beasts, which, freed by their captors, tortured and terrified, sought escape in the homes they knew.

To their nests in the eaves below the thatched roofs flew the swallows, harbingers of death. To wooden door posts and lintels ran the unhappy cats, destroyers of domestic hearths. Soon the city was in a blaze and the conquering army broke in through the gates and completed the work of devastation. Throughout the night they pillaged the place and slaughtered every mother's son who stood higher than the hub of a cart wheel.

"Oh ! you who desire peace," said Temudjin to Wangtshuk, when the trembling chief was brought before him, "know that you shall never find it, till you acknowledge my supremacy. And having given me the token I demanded, which I have returned, give me now a more valuable token, even your daughter, whom I will take to wife as security for your allegiance."

He married Salichai, daughter of Wangtshuk, and a little later took also the daughter of Tshagan, the second chief, who presented besides a magnificent tent adorned with panther skins.

In regal and barbaric state Temudjin subsequently beguiled some leisure. Possibly the two newly won maidens competed for his favour. Certainly they do not seem to have resented it. Khulan, whose father was Tshagan, boasted that she had an elder sister who, though already married,

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

was so beautiful that she deserved to be the great Khan's consort. They sought her out in her hiding place, killed her husband and brought her to Temudjin, who thereupon set her beside the other maidens and dallied impartially with all three.

At this time he was absent from Bortai for three years. A sidelight, illuminating the human interest with flashes of humour, is afforded by the communications which passed between them, and which, as recorded by Ssanang Setsen, the Mongol historian and descendant of Dai-Setsen, Bortai's father, are worth quotation.

"Bortai sent Arghassun, the lute player, with this message:

"'Your wife . . . your princely children, the elders and princes of your kingdom, all are well. The eagle builds his nest in a high tree; at times he grows careless in the fancied security of his high perched house. Then even a small bird will sometimes come and plunder it and eat the eggs and the young brood. So it is with the swan whose nest is in the sedges on the lake. It too trusts too confidently in the dark thickets of reeds. Yet prowling water falcons will sometimes come and rob it of eggs and young ones. This might happen to my revered lord himself.'"

What did she mean? Bortai was very wise. Idle to suppose that she was nervous for herself or her children when no enemies threatened them. Rumours of Temudjin's distractions had doubtless reached her. While the eagle or the swan amused himself far from home, the mother bird might well weary of solitude, the little brood might well fly away.

Anyhow, "These words aroused Temudjin from confidence and he hied him homewards, but when near began to grow timid."

The conscience-stricken man had had time to ponder those words and to consider what the wifely reception would be like.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

“ ‘ Spouse of my young days, chosen for me by my father, how dare I face you, home tarrying Bortai, after living with Khulan ! ’ ” (Even to himself he avoided confession of the two others !) “ ‘ One of you nine Orloks, hie you to Bortai and speak for me ! ’ ”

Mukuli of the Jelairs went, not relishing his mission, and thus delivered himself to Bortai, speaking for her lord. We may imagine the man’s expression, a hard bitten soldier, facing his ordeal less willingly than he would have faced death.

“ ‘ Besides protecting my own lands I have looked around also elsewhere. I have not followed the counsel of the greater or lesser lords. On the contrary, I have amused myself with the variegated colours of a tent hung with panther skins. Distant people to rule over, I have taken Khulan to be my wife. The Khan has sent me to tell you this ! ’ ”

It is inimitable. First a hint of bombast—he had been doing more than his duty. Then the proud negation of other counsels, with a grand effect of remaining above criticism. Follows the naïve reference to the variegated colours of the tent hung with panther skins. And finally the unpalatable truth.

We may also imagine the expression of Bortai as she listened. But imagination would fail to reproduce her answer, for Bortai was very wise.

“ ‘ The wish of Bortai Judjin and of the whole people, is that the might of our sovereign may be increased. It rests with him whom he shall befriend or bind himself to. In the reedy lakes there are many swans and geese. If it be his wish to shoot arrows at them till his finger grows weary, who shall complain ? So also there are many girls and women among our own people. It is for him to say who the choicest and luckiest are. I hope he will take to himself

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

both a new wife and a new house. May the golden girth of his house be immortal.' ”

So Temudjin came home and was forgiven. But after Bortai's first message, matters could hardly rest there. She now knew what he had been doing and was very nice about it. He had no idea what she had been doing and never would have. In order to justify himself, it was most necessary that he should suspect some one else. Why had they chosen old Arghassun, the lute player, as her messenger? His own golden lute was missing. Arghassun must be guilty of theft, perhaps of worse ! Arghassun must die !

Having decided this, Temudjin went to bed. To Arghassun, who was as innocent as a lamb, came the resourceful Mukuli and another friend saying, “ Your only chance is to win the Khan to a merciful humour ! ”

“ Alas, woe is me, what can I do ? ”

“ You must sing and amuse him. ”

“ Alas, alas, there is no music in me and my tears can draw nothing but mocking laughter. ”

“ Still you must sing, so sweetly or so absurdly that his heart relents. ”

Then they filled him with strong drink and thrust a lute into his hand and brought him to the Khan's tent. Temudjin regarded him coldly.

“ This is a rare bird, oh ! Khan, ” said Mukuli, “ you cannot afford to lose him. ”

Arghassun's unsteady legs refused to support him. With a foolish smile he sat down suddenly and striking his lute bawled in an uncertain voice :

“ While the seventy tuned Tsaktsagai unconcernedly sings tang-tang !

The hawk hovers over and suddenly pounces upon him and strangles him before he can bring out his last note, jang !

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

So did my lord's wrath fall on me and unnerve me !

For twenty years have I been in his household, but have
not yet been guilty of dishonest trickery !

It is true I love smoked drink,

But dishonesty I have not in my thought ! ”

Temudjin gave a great shout of laughter.

“ My loquacious Arghassun, my chattering Churchi,”
he ejaculated. “ You shall sing to me all night and
for many days to come. Mukuli, bring hither more
wine ! ”

Temudjin rejoined Wang Khan and the allies were once
more attacked by Merkits and other tribes over whom they
prevailed through the agency of sorcerers causing dense fogs
and bitter snowstorms to envelope the enemy.

Jamuka, the jackal, waited to see the fate of his agents,
and when they were defeated he fell on them and plundered.
Then he sat down slyly in an encampment near the victors
and waited for what would happen next.

Marriage negotiations went forward meanwhile between
Bortai's eldest son Juchi and the granddaughter of Wang
Khan, who now professed Christianity, and also between
the son of Sengun, Wang's grandson, and a daughter who
had been born to Temudjin. Eager as both sides were for
these betrothals the contracts failed, owing to mischief being
made between the heads of each family by the plotter Jamuka.
He, apprised of Temudjin's faith in Prester John, caused
doubts to be cast on the identification of Wang with such a
personage.

Wang had fallen from power and, according to Jamuka,
was merely using his ally. Moreover though he now called
himself a Christian, he preferred his old superstitions and
invariably consulted his Shamanist witch doctors. He
wielded no sceptre cut from a single emerald. No strange

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

fantastic peoples or beasts owned his rule. The widely advertised empire of the priest king could never be his.

At the same time, Jamuka turned confidently to Sengun and told him that Temudjin, who had ousted him from his position as Wang's firstborn was only biding the opportunity to ruin father and son alike. Sengun, jealous already, lent an attentive ear to these whisperings. A pact was formed between the two, its purpose the murder of Temudjin and the extermination of Hoelun's brood.

When their preparations were complete, they invited Wang to share them. The old man rejected the vile proposal, but weakened by Sengun's persuasions allowed the plot to go forward, merely refusing to take any part in it. Sengun pretended to yield his daughter after all to Juchi and invited Temudjin to the betrothal feast. Temudjin, however, rendered suspicious by this sudden change, sent two comrades to the festival and himself stayed away.

The wolf could not be trapped. Therefore he must be hunted and killed in his lair. Two of Sengun's horseherds overheard the new plan and rode forth to warn the victim.

Temudjin gathered his forces together and awaited the oncoming enemy. With them, he learned, was Wang, who had yielded to much urging and had now turned against him. When both armies had been disposed, a desperate battle took place. Sengun was badly wounded and though Temudjin held the field, his victory was inconclusive, and his own son, the boy Ogotai, was missing, together with Boroul and Boorchu, his faithful attendants.

"Oh! Ogotai, my son Ogotai, are you indeed lost to me! Fair and strong were you, oh! my son, and dear to me in the promise of your youth. How can I continue without you, oh! Ogotai!"

He quenched the ravaging fire of his grief and throughout

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

that dreadful night held his warriors ready in expectation of attack.

As morning dawned, a man rode in from the battleground. It was Boorchu, blood bespattered, grey faced but unhurt. His own horse had been killed. He had caught another and escaped. He had not seen Ogotai or Boroul.

A little later another horseman appeared. Strange his distant aspect. On one side of the saddle hung two legs near his own. When he came near they saw the body on his saddle bow. The rider was Boroul, the body that of Ogotai, pierced through the neck by an arrow, but breathing still.

They brought the boy in to his father and revived him. Temudjin, hearing how he had been saved by Boroul, broke down and wept.

The opposing armies parted, and word was brought to Temudjin that Wang, frightened by Sengun's hurt, believed this to be a judgment for his own treachery, and had abandoned the battle, carrying Sengun carefully with him.

Temudjin had now only five thousand men left, but through diplomacy he proceeded to win the allegiance of other tribes. Then he reconsidered his position with regard to Wang.

Was he inspired merely by self-interest or by some lingering faith in the destiny of his old and fickle friend? Did he dream only of his own empire already assured by his unaided genius, or did he look still for an alliance with a greater empire than he could build?

The myth of Prester John was no myth in his day. Somewhere this great potentate was known to exist, somehow and somewhen his full glory would be revealed. Who should he honour in the day of his power but the man with sufficient foresight to support him against all odds in the

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

hour of his need ? Who but Prester John, the friend of God, mightiest monarch on earth, was worthy also to be the friend and ally of Temudjin, son of Heaven ?

Whatever were Temudjin's thoughts (and these are not unlikely considering how he had been cheated and betrayed) he sent the following message, remarkable for the generosity of its appeal to Wang Khan :

" We are now east of the Tungela, grass here is good and our horses are satisfied. Why were you angry with me, oh ! my father ! When you were driven away by the Naimans, did I not attack and defeat your enemies ? When, in your distress, you came to me with your body peering through your tatters like sun through clouds and, worn out with hunger, you did move languidly like an expiring flame, did I not fall on the tribes that molested you and present you with an abundance of sheep and horses ? We have done you many services. Do you not remember, oh ! Khan, my father, how we swore that if a snake glided between us and envenomed our words, we would not listen to it till we had received some explanation ? Yet did you suddenly leave me without asking me to explain. Oh ! Khan, my father, why suspect me of ambition ? I have not said ' My part is too small, I want a greater,' or ' It is a bad one, I want a better.' When one wheel of a cart breaks and the ox tries to drag it, it only hurts its neck. If we then detach the ox, thieves come and take the load. If we do not un-yoke it, the ox dies of hunger. Though small, I am worth many large men, though ugly I am worth many men of much beauty. You and I are like the two shafts of a khibitka or its two wheels. Will you not depend on me still as on a shaft or a wheel ? Will you not refrain from attack on me since I have attacked neither you nor Sengun and have done you good rather than harm ? "

This message was brought to Wang where he lived in

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

the pomp that Temudjin had partly restored to him—a pomp not equal to his former splendour, a little shabby perforce, a little weary to its central figure. And Wang hearing the message sighed deeply.

“Temudjin is my only friend,” he said. “Would I had never left him.”

Then he took a knife and cutting his finger let the red drops fall into a little cup of horn. And he said, “Take this to Temudjin and repeat what I now tell you. If I am ever false to him may the rest of my life blood be shed.”

The bond thus sanctified was renewed and cemented by a fresh marriage between Temudjin himself and Wang’s niece, who had also been converted to the Christian faith.

Meanwhile Temudjin sent a message of defiance to Jamuka: “You have tried through hatred and envy to part me from my father. He has sent me a cup filled with a dark draught, which I shall force you to drink even to the dregs. Much loss there will not be to anyone from your drinking.”

But to Sengun he said: “You and I are brothers. You were born to our father naked and helpless. I came to him full grown and clothed. Cease from jealousy and comfort him now, as I comforted him aforetime. Unless we act together it will be clear that you desire only to rule in his stead.”

Sengun, with Jamuka at his elbow, answered furiously, “Battle is my first and last word to Temudjin!”

No sooner were the negotiations between Wang and Temudjin concluded, than the wretched Wang again fell under the influence of the plotters, and captured the wife and children of Temudjin’s brother Juchi-Kassar as hostages.

This open affront was met by Temudjin with a ruse.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

He sent two servants who pretended to come from Kassar and offered Kassar's submission to the Khan of the Keraites, on condition that the family were restored.

Wang, with his state increased by Jamuka, received the messengers in a tent embroidered with gold, assented to the proposal and held a great feast in jubilation. The servants returned and reported all that they had seen and heard.

"Now," they said, "is the time to attack this nest of serpents. Believing that Kassar is false and Temudjin's power gone, they grow careless and pass their time in feasting and rejoicing. The old one is in the hands of Jamuka and Sengun, who use him as their tool."

Temudjin could wait no longer. With a small army of four thousand six hundred men he surprised Wang at Urga and surrounded his encampment. The battle raged for three days. Then the Keraites surrendered. Their Khan and his son had fled. Jamuka had also vanished.

Temudjin honoured the chief commander for his brave defence and treated him as a hero. The prisoners he divided amongst his own comrades. The golden tent he presented to the two horseherds who had warned him of the original murderous plot against his life. The jewels and silken hangings and instruments of music he distributed amongst his servants.

The fugitives, Wang and Sengun, had escaped, practically unattended, towards the Naiman frontier. These Naimans, under the leadership of Bai-buga, the father of Kuskluk, the strong man, were their enemies, but fearing the danger that lay behind more than that which lay before, they hoped to pass unobserved into this great territory.

They came to a ford on a river, and the old man dismounted saying, "I faint from thirst and weariness. I can go no further till I have drunk."

Sengun observed a picket of warriors approaching to

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

guard the passage and galloped quickly away. Wang, thinking of nothing but his intolerable thirst, stooped to the water, but before his lips could reach it he felt himself roughly seized.

"Unhand me," he shrieked to the soldiers. "I am Khan of the Keraits. Great shall be your reward if you deliver me in safety to my own people."

Violently they forced him to his knees again.

"That is a fine story, brigand. If you have any gods, call on them now, for you will find no mercy from us."

"Christ save me!" wailed Wang. Then his head drooped in resignation. "The symbol of the cross has been an omen of ill luck to me," he muttered. "Would I had trusted to my shamans!"

A soldier raised his sword. At the last, Wang let out a loud cry like a final appeal for succour to the only disinterested friend he had known, "Oh! Temudjin!"

The sword descended and his old foolish head rolled into the water.

Thus perished miserably the Khan of the Keraits, one of the many historical figures whom Nestorian missionaries, denying for many years his death, identified with Prester John and undoubtedly credited by Temudjin for a time with this distinction.

His son Sengun did not long outlive him.

With one attendant, called Kokocha, and that attendant's wife, he rode westward, skirting the Naiman territory. Kokocha soon deserted him, but the woman refused to leave their master. Sengun was killed by tribesmen on the Tibetan border, having attempted to plunder them, and when these tribesmen submitted to Temudjin, they sent back the faithful woman, who was duly rewarded for her service.

Kokocha, however, on attempting to join Temudjin, was promptly put to death as a base deserter.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Wang Khan's severed head was taken as a trophy to the Naiman chieftain Bai-buga. He, resenting what he took for an expression of mockery on the dead face, which seemed to smile at him, caused the skull to be made into a drinking cup mounted with silver.

Later the gruesome object fell into the hands of Temud-jin, who, hearing its history, held it and thus addressed it :

“ Poor mortal whom once I took to be immortal ! To what poverty are you now reduced ? In life you held the thoughts and passions of a human brain. Now you can only hold the wine that inspires or clouds the fancies of other minds. Is that your secret, oh ! Prester John ? Are you a thing of nought in yourself, an empty cup into which my own liquor shall be poured ! Or shall I find you somewhere yet, oh ! friend of God, fit friend whom I desire to uphold me in the loneliness of my soul ? ”

CHAPTER IX

BAI-BUGA, whose title was Tayang Khan of the Naimans, was the father-in-law of Temudjin through the latter's new wife, Kushluk's daughter and Wang Khan's niece, Kushluk and Wang having been half brothers, with the same mother.

Nevertheless, Bai-buga, regarding Temudjin as an upstart, made haste to attack him and from among the remnants of other tribes found many allies, the foremost of whom was Jamuka, still the irrepressible enemy.

Jamuka cared more for his own skin than for any cause, and finding Temudjin well prepared for battle, promptly adopted his favourite tactic of safety first and incontinently fled. On a large open plain, in a bloody engagement that lasted from sunrise to sunset, the Naiman forces were broken and beaten and Bai-buga, mortally wounded, was hurried from the field. His favourite wife, Kurbassu, was captured and added to Temudjin's harem, and his son Kushluk sought refuge with another relative.

One of the many prisoners taken was the Tayang's chancellor, an old Uigur of much learning called Tata-Kun. He was brought before the conqueror, who always showed respect to age when he found it allied to wisdom.

"Tell me, sir, how you served your master Bai-buga."

"To the best of my ability, oh ! Khan, I taught him the use of letters, known to my people, and kept for him his golden seal."

"How say you—his seal ? Is it an animal ?" enquired Temudjin, thinking of the denizens of Lake Baikal.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

"Nay, oh ! Khan," answered the Uigur gravely. "I have it here in my pouch. Permit me to show it to you."

He produced the Tayang's signet, wrought in pure gold and engraved with an ideograph.

"It appears an object of value," said Temudjin. "What is its use ?"

"When my master desired to send a message to friend or foe, he did not depend on word of mouth which may be forgotten or falsified. Instead he instructed an Uigur to write in his name, and when this was done he rubbed the engraving of the seal in ink, and stamped it below the writing. As all men recognised the mark for a sign, peculiar to his use, and as no letter from him could pass without the sign, misrepresentation of his wishes was impossible."

"The idea is new to me and it is good," said Temudjin. "I will certainly adopt it. Remain with me, sir, have the engraving altered and use the seal in my name. Moreover you shall also teach me and my sons those strange arts of reading and writing, which I have heard are worth learning. And we will attend to your instruction and glean from it the language and the customs of your wise people, the Uigurs."

Probably Temudjin was too much engrossed by the business of existence ever actually to learn the art of writing. He always employed secretaries but with them he had a direct method of imposing his will. His style was essentially simple and straightforward and did not alter when he had established his power. The story goes that, in his later days, he had occasion to dictate to a Persian amanuensis a letter to a refractory vassal.

"I will set my seal to these words," he said. "Hear and write : 'God has given me the empire of the world. Those who submit and let my troops pass will save their land,

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

their families and their goods. The others, who knows what will happen ? God alone knows.' Now let me read."

The Secretary had translated the message into the following words of his own language :

"Allah from whom all blessings flow has mercifully granted me dominion. What am I that I should enjoy the favour of Allah ? A thorn on the stem of a rose ! A golden cup into which the wine of beneficence is poured ! Fear not the thorn but gather the rose ! Regard not the cup but drain the rare vintage ! Shall not the flower of love then bloom on the bosom of friendship ? Shall not the juice of the grape be potent to unite us as brothers ? If the rose is cast aside because it has wounded, alas, love must die. If the cup is rejected, because it is heavy, alas, the wine will be watered with tears. Inscrutable are the decrees of Allah, in whose keeping all creatures remain."

The flowery paraphrase infuriated the conqueror.

"Fool," he shouted, "are you deaf or mad ? These are not the words I told you ! A man who can invent such stuff is too mischievous to live."

And he promptly gave orders that the unfortunate exponent of fine writing should be put to death.

When the Naimans were defeated, Temudjin did not rest till he had hunted down and slain or captured every Merkit and Tartar that had been allied with Bai-buga.

The boy, Subotai the Valiant, who had at the age of eighteen conducted his first campaign under Temudjin was now, at the age of twenty-one, one of the first commanders in the army. No military record in history is equal to that of this little known genius, who, having leapt to fame as a mere stripling, is now recognised by authorities as one of the greatest generals of all time.

Temudjin made for him now an iron khibitka (the equiva-

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

lent of those days to an armoured car) and told him to seek out and destroy all fugitives, who might combine to rise against him in the future.

"Though overwhelmed in battle they tore away recently like wounded wild deer or like wanton young stallions and now you must find them. If they fly on wings to the sky, become you a falcon and catch them. If like mice they bore into the earth, be a strong iron spade and dig them out of it. If they hide as fish in the sea, be a net and enclose them. To cross deep ravines and high mountains, choose the time when your horses are not weary. Spare your warriors on the road and hunt not at all save when need comes. Let not your warriors use croupers or breast straps lest their horses rush feebly. Should any man refuse you obedience, bring him hither if I know him, if not do you kill him in the place of refusal. . . . I have made a khibitka of iron to convey and protect you. Though far away you will ever be near me. Heaven will keep you most surely while travelling and will give you assistance."¹

Magnificent instructions, showing his personal consideration for every man and beast that served him. No wonder that Subotai was successful. And it was this success which led at last to the capture of Jamuka.

The jackal had now lost all his people and all his friends and had retreated with only five attendants to a mountain side where he lived by robbery and hunting. One day the five lay in wait for him and seizing him took him to Temudjin's camp in expectation of reward. But Jamuka had more pride than the animal to which he had been likened.

"Insolent slaves have caused my undoing," he said in a message to Temudjin. "Mistake not, oh! Khan, my friend, these words that I send you."

Temudjin promptly gave orders that the five men should

¹ Curtin.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

be slain before the eyes of the master they had betrayed. Then he summoned Jamuka himself to his presence. The former andas faced each other. Great was the contrast between them. Temudjin swarthy, square shouldered, strong with the grace of a lion, honest as the day, simply but richly accoutred, Jamuka, fair skinned, slim and handsome as ever, but in ragged clothes, and in desperate plight.

And, marvellous to relate, Temudjin's great heart warmed again to this man who had tricked him and had never ceased to work for his ruin and death. He looked long into Jamuka's defiant eyes and at last he spoke very gently.

"Once I made you a shaft of my khibitka but you deserted me. You have joined me again, so now be my comrade. Should one of us forget, the other will remind him. If one falls asleep the other will awake him. You have done me no harm, Jamuka. You have but tested the strength of my love for you."

Jamuka's face flushed and paled by turns. Death by torture he had expected, but the torment of meeting a soul so far above his own in goodness, beauty and truth was more than he could bear.

"I dare not look at you," he cried in a choked voice. "I can never be your comrade. No man on earth is fit to be your comrade. You are a hero and a leader of champions, but I am an outcast and worthless. Grant me one boon, of your greatness, oh ! Khan, that I may die straightway and without blood loss. And in return after death and for ages my spirit will watch over your descendants and protect them."

Then Temudjin grieved sorely, but he could not deny the request of Jamuka.

"So be it," he said. "Farewell, oh ! my anda. I would have saved your life, but you will not permit it. In another world we shall be reunited."

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

And they took Jamuka away and killed him quickly with a cord about his neck and without shedding his blood. In death the expression of his face was quiet and serene.

And they buried him with honour.

Temudjin, now supreme throughout the length and breadth of Mongolia, next made his first expedition to Tangut.

That country, the native name of which is like a sigh,¹ and the valleys and mountains of which are haunted by sorrowful spirits to this day, was a separate kingdom, bounded by the Sung Empire on the south-east, by the Kin Empire on the north-east and by the Uigurs and Tibetans on the west and south-west. Its geographical position corresponded roughly to the Chinese provinces of Kan-su and part of Shen-si. Its rulers claimed descent from the ancient Chinese Hsia dynasty of the second millennium B.C. The iron helmet (or Tang-Küeh) trimmed with red silk fringe and worn by its warriors, gave the land its commonly accepted appellation.²

The people were peace loving and good looking ; their climate was temperate and their circumstances were comfortable to the point of luxury. In religion they were chiefly Buddhists and their civilized customs were those of Cathay, but they had a separate written language, which is now dead.

The first expedition of Temudjin seems to have been mainly for the purpose of spying out the land. He forbore to ravage it and, beyond exacting tribute from the inhabitants, did not make his power felt and took only one captive and that a person of small importance in a curious encounter.

As he rode over a hillside where the wild rhubarb grew, showing its yellow flowers, he came on a flock of sheep crop-

¹ The Chinese or native name of Tangut was Si-hsia. ² Yule.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

ping the short grass. The pastoral beauty of the scene was like a delicate picture and its calm tranquillity afforded a striking contrast to the bands of rough Mongol horsemen who had invaded it. No one seemed to be in charge of the sheep, till presently at a little distance, the figure of a small boy was seen, apparantly engaged in a game of his own. He wore a camlet of soft white wool and on a stick set upright in the ground he had placed his round cap of scarlet cloth. Before this stick he was dancing and bowing and the childish treble of his voice rose in the words of a song.

“Honourable elder brother, I would learn of you,
How to comport myself with dignity and wisdom.
In these things sheep are my only instructors.,
But the desire of my heart is for a human teacher.”

Temudjin paused to listen and smiling said, “Solitude breeds strange fancies in the young. Bring hither the child that I may question him.”

The boy advanced without fear, carrying his cap in his hand and raised his dark eyes to the stern face bent above him.

“Why do you show respect to your own headgear, little brother?”

“I am alone and have no other companion, oh! Khan. Therefore I set my cap upon a stick taller than myself and pretend that it is a senior person. If there are two boys together the younger should behave with deference to the elder.”

“That is true,” replied the conqueror gravely. “And are you content with this friend?”

The child stroked the neck of Temudjin’s horse and gazed with awe and wonderment at its panoply and at the group of warriors around.

“Friends should interchange ideas,” he said, “and I find

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

this friend of mine rather silent. I would prefer him if he could speak, even if it were to correct my faults."

"How could that be since he is born only of your mind?"

"In my mind there seem often to be two or even three persons and I would place the third, who is the judge, outside and above myself. Hearing that you would pass this way, oh! Khan, I desired to practice before this judge the ceremonies due to you, when you should arrive."

"You and I ought certainly to know each other better, little brother, for I am often lonely too. Say, would you care to leave home and kindred and come away with me?"

The child's eyes shone. "I have no home but the hillside and no kindred but the sheep. You are he whom I would honour, and if you will take me I will serve you all the days of my life."

Temudjin stretched out his hand. "Mount," he said laconically. And when he had drawn the delighted boy on to his saddle bow and they were proceeding westward, he continued seriously, "You shall live with me in my tent and there are many things that we can teach each other. I can instruct you in horsemanship and the arts of war. But you, out of the wisdom of youth, can be my judge. And though I may be more like an elder person than your stick, you shall not find me readier to correct you, little brother."¹

The imperial standard, mounted with nine white yak tails, had never passed from the keeping of Temudjin.

In 1206, having then attained the age of forty-four, he raised this standard on the bank of the upper Onon river and summoned a Kurultai or council to decide on a new title that he should take to designate his greatness and distinguish

¹ Founded on an incident from Ssanang Setsen, as given by Howorth.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

him from all other Khans. His leaders, commanders and friends were gathered together to settle the important question. Wise men from every corner of the empire, Shamans, Buddhist priests and Nestorian teachers joined the throng.

Necromancers of various beliefs were consulted. But Temudjin would listen to none of them. He withdrew from the crowd and for several days before the final ceremony, when he should announce his will, absented himself in one of his favourite solitudes. Here he sought divine inspiration in communion with Heaven and ultimately found it in an omen of poetic simplicity.

The white pavilion, striped with crimson and gold, was erected. The standard floated in the wind. Thousands of warriors and herdsmen awaited the coming of the conqueror. His flocks and cattle extended for miles over the valley. The radiant weather was propitious. Cumulus clouds like the full bellied sails of ships floated over the blue sky.

"The Khan tarries. Where can he be?"

"What name will he choose?"

"He should be called King of Kings, for there is none to equal him on earth."

"Son of Heaven has always been the title he preferred."

"Others have taken that name. He must stand alone."

At last he advanced from his tent. He was dressed plainly like a soldier, without jewels or ornaments of any kind. His face was serious and still, his figure instinct with vitality and strength. About his whole bearing there was something majestic and dignified, that made him appear a natural master of men. A great shout of welcome arose to greet him. He took his seat on the dais covered with sable skins, and leant forward, his chin on his hand.

On his right hand stood his brothers and chosen comrades,

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

on his left hand Hoelun and Bortai, with all his other wives a little in the rear.

"Make known to these your people, oh ! Khan, your wishes," said Tata-Kun, the councillor and keeper of the golden seal.

Then Temudjin spoke quietly in a discursive voice, as though he told a tale to children.

"While I considered what title I should take, I put away from my mind all thoughts of conquest in the past or in the future and thought of myself only as a poor mortal in the sight of Heaven. And, as I sat on the hillside pondering the greatness of the earth and the wide arch of the sky, there came a little bird whose name I do not know and perched on a flat stone near by. In shape it was like a lark and its plumage was of five colours. The feathers of its back were brown and grey, on its wings were lines of red and yellow and its throat was white. And while it perched there, this little bird, not fearing my presence, piped a little song. And the sound of it was like ching-iz, ching-iz. On three succeeding mornings, very early came the same little bird to the stone and sounded the same little notes. So it seemed to me that he called to me as a friend or a brother and that Heaven had informed him of the name by which I must be called. This and no other shall a cordingly be my title—Chingiz, which means Very Mighty. For God alone can be called the Mightiest, and had I not learnt from the little bird I should perchance have sinned in choosing that name myself."

Then every man acclaimed their Khan by his new title, Chingiz, and extolled his wisdom and his modesty.

There, in the Kurultai, Chingiz Khan inaugurated his code of laws by which death was the punishment for homicide, for adultery, for the theft of cattle and for the loss three times of a prisoner entrusted to any man's charge. Also he spoke to his people like a father, reminding them that it was

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

forbidden to wash clothes or domestic vessels with water, which might be scarce ; therefore all garments should be worn as long as they held together and all vessels should be scoured with dried grass or felt. Further he said :

“ Concerning the use of fermented liquor. If you cannot refrain, get drunk only three times a month. It would be better never to get drunk at all, but who can abstain altogether ? ”

And all men wondered to hear his words and remembered them long after.

Then the conqueror proceeded to reward all his comrades and friends and those who had helped him to establish his power.

To Munlik, now the husband of Hoelun and his stepfather, he said, “ Once you cursed me out of the fulness of your heart, but since then you and your sons have served me well. Therefore you shall sit first in my assembly, and this honour shall be continued to you and your descendants by me and mine.”

To Boorchu, who had helped him to find his eight horses when they were stolen, he said.

“ From the first day we met you have been my faithful friend and companion, devoted in trouble and sharing my triumphs. For this, I free you from the penalty of nine death offences and make you commander of ten thousand and give you rule over the land that stretches westward, even to the Altai mountains.”

To Mukuli, another comrade, he gave command over the eastern territory and the left wing of his army, and to Horchi of the Barins, who had prophesied his greatness and shared his toils, he gave control over the forest nations on the Irtish and promised him the right to choose for himself thirty beautiful maidens and women among all conquered peoples.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

To Churchiadai, the bravest of his generals, he gave one of his own newly gained wives, a woman called Ibaha, and took care to tell her that this was not because he did not love her himself, for she was comely and agreeable, but because he desired to favour Churchiadai in the highest way possible.

Chelmai and Boroul also he did not forget and on Sorgan Shira he bestowed the land of the Merkits and his own undying friendship. And many others he rewarded likewise at this time, recounting their deeds, and filling them with gratitude for his generosity.

But when he had thus recognised the services of all his empire builders, the seven sons of Munlik, in spite of the honour done to their father and themselves after him, remained dissatisfied. They were all of a truculent and bitter disposition, but the worst of them was a Shaman¹ called Taibtengeri, whose ambition was boundless. His wish was to alienate the affection of Chingiz from his own brothers, in order that the Khan should depend more wholly on his step-brothers.

Plotting together, therefore, Munlik's sons fell one day on Juchi-Kassar and beat him. Kassar, enraged, went to Chingiz and complained, but Chingiz would not listen to tale bearing.

"Are you a child," he said impatiently, "to come to me for protection in your brawls? Defend yourself and let me hear no more of such nonsense."

Kassar, remembering perhaps the early quarrel with Baiktar, when he had shot the avenging arrow, went off in a temper and set three days distance between himself and his brother.

Then came Taibtengeri to Chingiz and said, "The Khan has heard perhaps that we have shown scant respect to

¹ A priest of the Shamanist persuasion.

Juchi-Kassar. In this we intended no affront to majesty. But Heaven has revealed to me that Kassar desires to rule after Chingiz and, if he is not set aside, the rule of Chingiz will surely be short lived. In attacking him we considered only the Khan's safety."

Chingiz believed these words and, with his usual promptitude, set forth that same night to seize Kassar in his separate encampment.

Hoelun, hearing what had happened, started also secretly, in a khibitka drawn by a trotting camel.

Chingiz reached Kassar's yurt first and entering it without ceremony in the darkness, roughly awoke his brother and demanded an explanation. Kassar was angrier than ever, but the Khan quickly pinioned his arms with his girdle and said, "I shall not leave you till you have confessed your plot against me."

Like a wild beast caught in a trap, Kassar rolled on the ground struggling to free his bonds and threatening Chingiz with loud and furious words. The Khan, no less indignant, sat on the couch and spurned the wretched man with his foot. Neither of them heard the approaching wheels of the khibitka or the softly padding feet of the camel. Suddenly the door flap of the tent was torn aside, revealing the grey light of a lurid dawn and Hoelun's figure in the entrance.

"Shame on you, Temudjin," she cried. "You, who shed the blood of your brother Baiktar, you who were born to be a slayer of men, are you bent also on the death of Kassar?"

The Khan leapt to his feet in confusion. She advanced boldly, stooped over Kassar and loosed him. Then while he crouched, rubbing his numbed arms, she sat down between the two and with a passionate gesture bared her bosom, which drooped and was shrivelled with age.

"These are the breasts that gave you suck," she said.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

"Strike first at them, oh ! Temudjin, before you raise your hand against another of your kindred. Though you are my first born, and I watched over your early years, no love have you left for me since I rescued my own child in preference to Bortai. But much love owe you yet to Kassar, who has shot many arrows in your defence."

Chingiz tried to interpose a word, but she went on—"Your enemies are subdued and you need Kassar no longer. Yet if you touch a hair of his head, it shall never be forgiven you. Heaven will avenge him and I will go down to my grave calling curses upon you."

Chingiz could not bear the wrath of his mother. He went to the door flap and watched the morning, robed in pearl, creeping over the hills. It was very quiet and the stillness and fresh air were like cool hands laid on his fevered thoughts. He turned at last and addressed Hoelun.

"Mother, I am shamed ; forgive my past treatment of you. Forgive me, also, oh ! Kassar. I have committed the great sin. I have allowed fear to enter my heart. First I was afraid, believing that I had lost Bortai. Lastly I was afraid, believing my brother a traitor. Though I have won a mighty dominion and many followers, I am solitary, oh ! my Mother, and need your love."

Kassar, still smarting from a sense of humiliation, grunted an ungracious response and left the yurt.

Hoelun did not rise from the ground, but wrapping herself in her cloak, she rocked her body to and fro, as though her empty arms held an infant.

"Too great are you now for me, Temudjin. Always there was about you something different from the rest—a spirit that made me quail. Your tiny fists bruised me even as you clamoured for milk. . . . When I was most desolate, there came to me one, whose aspect was that of the sun at midday, and made me glad. He was your father,

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Yessagai, and him only did I love. A woman cannot divide her love in two. Either she gives it wholly to husband or wholly to son, and he to whom she gives it is as a god in her eyes. When death took Yessagai it took also my heart. I served you but it was only for the sake of your father—that hero, whose splendour was dimmed by the desertion of the tribe.”

“May I not also be a hero to you, oh ! Mother ?”

“You were born holding in your hand a lump of dark blood, Temudjin. Never have I forgotten that omen. Always I must regard you with terror, as a man apart, stained by a fearful destiny. Approach me not, Temudjin, ravaging wolf, whose might is terrible, for in days to come it shall be said of you that there was only one thing in which you had no equal and that was the slaughter of human beings.”

He shuddered and left her then. She had said little to reconcile him with Kassar and he had no reason yet to trust his brother. He felt also that it was impossible to understand the mind of women. He had imagined Hoelun happy with Munlik and it appeared that she still mourned Yessagai.

As a precaution for his own safety, he subsequently deprived Kassar of a great part of his authority and when Hoelun heard of this action, she surprised him further by her inconsolable grief.

Though he did not know it, the troubles of their past existence had gradually been undermining her vitality, and leaving her the prey of melancholy, which settled on her being like a vulture. Her heart did not break for Kassar, but it had cracked for Yessagai. Now it could no longer sustain any shock.

One day she started from sleep with a loud welcoming cry—

“My lord !”

Then, smiling, she closed her eyes and seemed to slumber again in great contentment.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

After the death of Hoelun, Taibtengeri, the unscrupulous Shaman, having made mischief between Chingiz and Juchi-Kassar, continued seeking to embroil the Khan with the rest of his own brothers in the same way. But now Bortai acted the part of peacemaker and with more effect.

While Udjughen, who had been insulted and humiliated by the truculent seven, was reporting his grievance to Chingiz, she came to them from her own yurt with nothing but a blanket round her shoulders and fell on her knees weeping at the feet of her husband.

"My lord, if your own brothers, majestic as cedars, are to be ruined in your life time, what will happen to your children when you are dead?"

"Deal with Taibtengeri as you will," said Chingiz wearily to Udjughen.

And Udjughen went out and lay in wait for the Shaman with three strong wrestlers, who fell upon him suddenly and broke his back. His body was cast aside for a time and Munlik, with his six remaining sons, came to Chingiz with reproaches and threats.

"Let me alone," cried the Khan in desperation. "You are worse than a crowd of chattering women!"

And going out, he ordered that Taibtengeri's corpse should be carried into his own tent. But though the door flap, the windows and the smoke hole were closely fastened and a guard was put round the yurt, on the third day the body of the Shaman had vanished.

"He was a holy man and he has been caught up to Heaven," whispered his supporters with superstitious reverence.

"Not so," answered Chingiz. "He was an evil man and the proof of this is that Heaven was not content with taking his life but took also his carcase, causing it to disappear like smoke."

With these words he quelled all murmuring and reduced

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Munlik and his family to obedience. He was now supreme, not only throughout his own land, but among his own people. No one could gainsay his power ; no one could challenge his dominion.

In 1207, Tangut, which had failed to pay tribute, was invaded for the second time and temporarily reduced to subjection.

Then came the turn of Kara Khitai, that great empire, comprising many nations, which stretched in length from Tangut to the Kwaresmian Empire and in breadth from the Upper Irtysh to the Pamirs, thus including practically the whole of Central Asia.

The most notable and most civilized of its many peoples were the Uigurs, and the title of their ruler was Idikut. Trouble arising between the Uigurs and their suzerain, the Gurkhan of Kara Khitai, gave the Idikut an opportunity to appeal for aid to Chingiz. When the great Khan responded by sending envoys to the Uigur court, the Idikut received them with the highest honour and acknowledged himself the vassal of the conqueror, confirming his expression of goodwill thereafter with presents of gold and silver and pearls.

The chieftains of other tribes in Kara Khitai hastened to follow this example, and the bonds of amity were strengthened by various new marriages.

Tangut alone dared to raise once more a rebellious head, only to be squashed again and subsequently pacified by an alliance between Chingiz and the King's daughter.

He was now the acknowledged suzerain of an enormous territory, for the Gurkhan of Kara Khitai had lost all authority.

But Chingiz was not yet satisfied. He had set himself to build a new and great Empire on the basis of old civilizations, already crumbling to ruin through inherent decay.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

He never departed from his object. Like strong plants which grow more freely for the manure of leaf mould, his main conquests were to flourish in soil enriched, blackened and softened by luxury.

He was now only on the threshold of his tremendous career. And as he stood on this threshold, between the east and the west, his opportunity called him.

CHAPTER X

KHITAI or Cathay was then the great northern empire of China, that country that has the area of a continent larger than Europe and is called by its own people Chung Kuo, the Middle Kingdom.

Of its present eighteen provinces, the Khitans, originally of Manchu stock, then only held five instead of the six which comprise the northern basin of the Yellow River, for Tangut, which is now known as Kan-su, was a separate dominion.

The Khitans had ruled this territory since the fall of the famous T'ang dynasty, which had governed the whole of Chung Kuo from 618 A.D. to 907.

After a period of long disturbance, the Khitans had asserted themselves and gained immense power. Subsequently they had supported a rebel chieftain in the south, who became their vassal and a separate emperor having as his capital K'ai-fêng Fu on the Yellow River. His rule did not last long and was succeeded by no less than five other petty dynasties, which culminated in the house of Sung, historically noteworthy but still acknowledging the suzerainty of the north.

The Khitan Empire lasted two centuries, became enfeebled by luxury and intermarriage with the peaceable Chinese and was at last superseded by the nomad and warlike tribe of the Niu-chi. Attacked and defeated, the last Khitan ruler retired to Manchuria where he and his successors survived only as Princes of Liao and vassals of the conquerors.

The Niu-chi called their newly acquired state Kin Kuo,

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Golden Kingdom, and established the Kin dynasty under an Emperor known to the Mongols as the Golden Khan.

The Sung Emperor, who continued to be a vassal of the northern ruler, after an abortive attempt to gain further power, moved to Lin-ngan Fu or Hang-chou and held all the country south of the Yang-tse River. The Kins honoured five separate towns with the title of Imperial Residence—K'ai-fêng Fu was their southern capital; Tung-king was the eastern court, Tai-teng Fu the western court, Ta-ning Fu the northern court, and the city now called Peking and then known as Chung Tu, was the Central Capital.

The Golden Khans were constantly at war with the Mongols, who threatened their frontiers, and as they followed in the footsteps of the Khitans and became gradually enfeebled, they were forced to make concessions, which for them were the beginning of the end.

In turning his attentions to China, Chingiz was, therefore, in reality carrying on a feud of long standing. He had already received an embassy led by a prince of the reigning Kin dynasty, whose name was Chong hei, and the mild appearance and timorous manners of this young man had aroused his antipathy, while to Chong hei he had appeared as nothing but a barbarian.

One day in the Spring of 1210, Chingiz sat on a hillside above his camp on the Kerulon, dreaming of the future and sucking a stem of grass, when he was informed that envoys had arrived from the Court of Cathay.

"Let them come hither to me," was his answer. "I go not to meet any embassy of ancient enemies."

A jutting rock was his throne, the flowered turf was his carpet, the wide sky his canopy. His domain lay at his feet.

The Chinese messengers were ushered to his presence.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

In contrast with the Mongols, their demeanour was grave, polite and ceremonious to the last degree. They had travelled many hundreds of miles, but no dust defiled the elegance of their raiment, no expression of fatigue disturbed the serenity of their countenances. Bowing to the Khan, with hands joined and hidden in their wide coat sleeves, they greeted him with appropriate compliments and felicitous wishes. Chingiz nodded curtly in response and continued to chew the grass stem.

Such indecorous behaviour cast no faintest shadow of surprise across those impassive faces. Only some Mongols in the background grinned rudely and whispered to one another. At last Chingiz cut short the flowery discourse with a peremptory question.

“What has brought you?”

“We come to announce tidings dark as smoke and bright as fire,” answered the chief spokesman. “The lamented Emperor Mukadu passed to his ancestors six moons ago. A new Son of Heaven, eighth of the dynasty and glorious beyond description, now rules in his place.”

“Ah!” said Chingiz. “I am not greatly concerned with your news.”

“It is customary,” said the Chinese gently, after a brief pause, “for vassals of the reigning state to receive such intelligence kneeling and with due reverence, in accordance with established etiquette.”

A truculent murmur arose from the Khan’s attendants, and his own nostrils were slightly dilated.

“Who is this new Emperor?” he asked.

“The Prince Chong-hei, than whom no one is greater.”

Chingiz suddenly spat the grass stem from his lips in the direction of the south, rose and stretched his arms above his head.

“I had thought that the Son of Heaven must be lofty

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

and uncommon," he said in a tone of studied insolence. "But how is this idiot Chong-hei to sit on a throne and why should I lower myself in his presence?"

Then he mounted his steed and rode away without further word or explanation.¹

Great was the delight of his own people over the discomfiture of the Kin envoys. Chingiz reminded his followers of the sufferings inflicted by the Chinese monarchs on their forefathers and of the repeated failures of the Kins to conquer and subdue their land. He recalled also his own victories and promised that if all would continue to support him a great triumph over the ancient and powerful enemy might yet be expected, a triumph through which the name of the Mongols would never die.

It was then arranged that an envoy from himself should return with the Chinese embassy bearing a message to the Golden Khan.

The two parties set forth and, after travelling for several weeks, came to the mountain barrier which walls off the Mongolian plateau from the northernmost province of Cathay, the great Chih-li plain. This barrier consists of parallel ranges from one hundred to one hundred and thirty miles wide and is pierced by more than one narrow water-carved cleft, the best known of which is the Kalgan defile.

The southern side of the barrier once formed the cliffs of the Chih-li gulf, when what is now a sandy plain was covered by an arm of the Yellow Sea.

Before the travellers could enter the winding descending road to the first defile, they reached, at the edge of their own plateau, the Great Wall, which here originally guarded the approach to the Middle Kingdom. Then, as now, this was the easiest way; therefore it has always been the most

¹ Curtin.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

strongly fortified. The pass itself is now crossed by no less than four walls, built under the Ming dynasty, all with battlemented towers and gateways, under and through which goes the ancient road.

But, in the time of the Mongol embassy, there was probably only one wall and that the outermost, which was designed and partly built by the first universal monarch of China, Shih Huang-ti, in B.C. 221. It was then justly considered an impregnable barrier against all predatory hordes. The Chinese themselves called it Wan li ch'ang ch'eng, the ten thousand *li* long wall.

Here it lay, the dividing line between barbarism and civilization, accentuating the natural line of demarcation between nomadic pastoral tribes and settled agricultural people. One of the wonders of the world, it rose superior to every contour of the landscape, traversing mountains and valleys to an occasional altitude of five thousand feet, from east to west along the entire frontier of fourteen hundred miles. It was a monument almost unequalled to human endeavour against natural obstacles ; it remains an achievement awe inspiring to this day, when it appears as a majestic ruin of unhewn and unmortared volcanic rock fragments. Its early aspect must have been terrific, for it was then twenty-two feet high and twenty-six feet broad and it was surmounted by huge square watch towers, at intervals of every hundred yards. In these watch towers the lonely guardians of the wall kept a perpetual lookout across the desolate land. And from one watch tower to another the alarm was given by the lighting of fires so that when the danger signals appeared an overwhelming force could concentrate at the threatened point.

Like some great monster the wall lay stretched along the frontier and a death stroke might thus be delivered from any one of its myriad heads.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

And behind this wall lay that land of the Dragon, the home of the greatest and oldest civilization in the world, unequalled in that it has never perished.

Did those Mongol envoys, first passing the barrier under cover of their embassy, feel the breath of that old serpent which has survived so many disturbances and which was ultimately to absorb them as it has absorbed every other conqueror who has dared to establish himself within its coils? Did its magic encompass them? Were they sensible of its strange and paralysing influence, the influence of a culture so deep and so antique that it is like the touch of death?

Who that has ever even guessed at the spell of China can escape its fascination or seeking a cause can describe it? It is a secret hidden in the mind of man, a mystery without a solution, a spiritual state only to be attained in aeons of evolution. Why, cry the uninitiated, has China never developed her natural resources? Why have the most reasonable people on earth failed to follow the path of reasoned progress? Because there is a point in civilization which is static, a point where mortal extinction is preferable to resistance, a point where it is better to yield to circumstance, better to die than to struggle. That is the answer.

And the answer does not spell inertia, but rather a philosophy built up of calm content and resignation which justifies itself through succeeding generations.

Reasoned passivity is the greatest force known to man, that electric energy which finds expression in the apparent stability of matter. A people who understood this law in the second millennium B.C., whose history before that is lost in the mists of time, whose principles have been purely democratic and unaffected by Imperial or Republican forms of government throughout the ages, whose unit of value is

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

never the individual but always the family—such a people are immortal.¹

Long before the uses of steam were imagined theirs were the greatest travellers and explorers ; long before the freedom of the Press was a catch word, they wearied of the multitude of their books ; long before the idea of peace beckoned the western world, they despised the futilities of war, but attempted in vain to prevent them by the establishment of a League of States. What use had the inventors of the compass for an instrument superseded by the development of a natural sense, akin to that of migratory birds, whereby they *feel* the cardinal points ? The art of the brush pen was rightly considered by them superior to the utilitarian printing block. The resort to arms was for them the abnegation of reason.

Therefore, when all these imagined agents of civilization were carried westward, they were content to let them go, and when their results recoiled on the land of their birth, China suffered superficially, but remained at heart unchanged.

So to this unalterable country came the Mongol envoys.

And the first of its characteristics to notice was the mystery of its loëss.

What her little hedgerows are to England, what her poplar edged roads are to France, so is her loëss soil to Northern China.

Geographers have marvelled over it. Geologists have differed about it. Sinologues have accepted it as the chief of China's unanswerable problems.

Over the great Gobi desert, called more appropriately by the Chinese Sha-mo, Sand Dust, blows the north-east wind.

¹ The actual record of Chinese dynasties begins with the age of the Five Rulers, B.C. 2852. As the first of these monarchs was the inventor of the Eight Trigrams, a cosmogony familiar in decoration, and never yet solved, the author of *the I Ching* and the arrangement of the calendar, these facts bespeak a civilization then already old.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

According to an accepted authority,¹ the loam of northern China, known as loëss, is due to subaerial deposits of the desert dust, which has obliterated through generations the original mountain outline and has filled up the valleys with a fertile earth thousands of feet thick. Its eternal fertility is its most remarkable quality and it is ascribed to the perpetual decay of the vegetation which arrests the dust. As one crop is buried and decays, another springs up and the evidence of this cycle lies in the marked vertical cleavage of the loam, due to perpendicular growth. Minute vertical hollows left by the rotting grasses make the loëss porous and it draws moisture and salts to the surface from the depths below. Accordingly the soil, which is never artificially enriched, constantly provides its own mineral manure and remains increasingly fruitful. At the same time, as its surface is soft and its construction loose, rivers and roads sink to the lowest stratum of rock and cut their way through in deep ravines. On either side of such passages, the loëss cliffs tower and solidify through the ages.

Descending from their bare open plateau the Mongol envoys found themselves enclosed in these tortuous defiles.

So narrow was the way and in places so high the walls, surmounted by fields of tall millet, that an army might have moved along that route, completely hidden except from some direct elevated vantage point.

The loëss took them between its arms and engulfed them. They went along a stone paved road, graded in steep steps, in which the age long rolling of cart wheels had marked deep ruts. They went through fair weather and through foul. In golden sunshine the eternal dust haze was like a thick veil of iridescent gauze, edged with the definite lines of growing crops. The cliffs cast a melancholy all-pervading shade in which sounded the whispers of a distant desert.

¹ Richtofen.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

In storms of rain, the remote mountains and the adjacent walls appeared dim and fluid. They had the aspect of hanging between earth and sky like the grotesque figures of a dream. Then the branches of fir trees, springing from outcrops of rock, seemed to fly in the wind like squirrels and the terrific wind itself was the only tangible thing in a world of mist and cloud.

They passed the frontier town of Kalgan, lying on the north-west extremity of a valley plain, formed by the levelling loëss out of the mountain basin. Its fertility still makes it a famous fruit growing centre, and here they went through the city of Hsüan-hua, which Marco Polo calls Sindachu.

They were amazed by the beauty of the buildings and the multitude of the people. Ceaseless throngs paraded the main street, filling the air with a clamour of voices, and the attendants of the Chinese envoys, armed with sticks, ran in advance of the procession to clear the way. Stone houses were painted in vivid colours and the shops, with their gay shutters and brilliant hanging signs, displayed a wealth of fabrics and comestibles beyond any Mongol's dream of plenty. Velvets, damasks, figured silks, tissues of precious metal were stocked there in bales. Grapes, apples, melons, pumpkins, cucumbers, cabbages and rhubarb, fruits, vegetables, roots, and seeds in marvellous abundance testified to the richness of the earth. In the outskirts of the city were temples where golden gods and saints awaited the supplications of the people, when they should realise the meaning of the Mongol visitation. But in all the houses good Confucianists continued calmly to do honour each one to his own ancestral tablets and to observe the laws of filial piety.

Leaving the town, the envoys continued to descend by a cornice road cut in the limestone to the gorge of a muddy river, endyked into paddy fields. They learnt that this limestone range yielded a certain kind of coal, called anthra-

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

cite, but all species of that fuel were equally strange to them.

Then they came into another loëss levelled valley, which debouched by the second defile, past the village of Nank'ou on to the plain.

Along the whole way, the character of the stone paved high road did not alter, though it was enlivened by so many new impressions. On its remotest parts they encountered many blue robed peasants, who bowed to the ground in deference to the Chinese officials and greeted the Mongols with polite salutations. And, after they had left Nank'ou, they met a wandering priest of the Taoist faith, evidently from the south, whose rich and fantastic dress and whose courtly manners filled them with surprise. He wore a coat of silvery brown brocade, edged with embroidery of blue and white silk, overlaid with a design of golden leaves and girdled with a multi-coloured padded sash. From the open lobes of his ears hung heavy gold rings and his long necklace was composed of strange charms. He carried on his back a cabinet of bamboo and silk, a lantern and an umbrella. From his sash depended a fan and a cylindrical writing case and at his side hung a large sword. With his clean white socks, his rope sandals, his shaven head and the shrewd eyes which looked out from under drooping brows, he appeared from top to toe a man of the world, as well equipped by nature as by education to meet every emergency.

Thus travelling and marvelling exceedingly at all they saw and heard, the Mongol envoys came at last to the goal of their journey, the wonderful city of Chung Tu.

Peking (or Pei-ching, literally North Capital) had in the days of its former splendour many names. Under the T'ang dynasty it was known as Yu-chau, the Khitans and

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Kins called it Chung Tu, and the name of Yen-king, given to it in 1013, seems to have been synonymous and preferred in historical records of the Mongol invasion. It was rebuilt by the grandson of Chingiz, Kubilai Khan, who called it Tai-du, Great Court. The name Cambaluc, given by Marco Polo, is a derivative of Khan-balig, the city of the Khan.

The present choice of Chung Tu appears appropriate to the reigning dynasty.

A mud rampart surrounded the city and its suburbs with a circuit of twenty-three miles and, within this, a wall, built of enormous grey bricks, reinforced with lime and solid as iron, very high and wider at the base than at the summit, enclosed the town itself in a circumference of nine miles.

This frowning rampart was pierced with many gateways and every gateway was surmounted by a massive tower of brick and wood and faced by an enceinte with a side entrance.

Passing through the outer barrier, the travellers came into a park like space, studded with trees, watered by large and small lakes and containing the Temple of Heaven. That great architectural conception had not probably at this time the beauty and grace of its reconstruction under the Ming dynasty, some hundreds of years later, but as its site remained approximately the same it may be supposed that its circular terraces, whether built of marble, wood or earth, were alike in form, and that this pure idea of worship remained unaltered. Then, as after, the Emperor, who was the Son of Heaven, the chosen Mediator between God and Man, must have been accustomed to stand once a year on the high central platform, under the wide sky, and take upon himself the sins of his people.

The lakes of the district are now mere dry depressions in the ground, but a river springs from that source to flow through the Tartar city, which was built to the north-east

160

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

of ancient Chung Tu. Modern Peking, partly superimposed on old Tai-du, comprises also the Chinese city raised on the ground of the former eastern suburbs.

The suburban dwellings of Chung Tu were rude structures of thatch, felt and mud and must have reminded the Mongols of one of their own encampments. Among them were the booths of market places, for the outer district of the city was one of the chief marts of the world, on which caravans converged from the most distant parts of Asia. Here the slow pacing camels brought their loads of wool from Mongolia, of silk from Transoxiana, of jade from the rivers of Khotan. Here were collected furs from the Steppes of Siberia, ivory from the forests of India, and spices from the islands of the southern seas. Here every material in the shape of dyes, pigments, precious stones and metals was gathered to feed the ceaseless industry of the inner city and here also was garnered the wherewithal to support life, blocks of brick tea and cases of the finest leaf, sacks of millet and droves of sheep and cattle, poultry from outlying farms and fish from sea or river, corn for the multitude and delicacies for a rich man's table such as edible birds' nests and eggs preserved to the consistency of jelly.

No plan or picture remains of the original city of Chung Tu. But, as the Mongols knew nothing of building, Tai-du must have been the work of the Chinese and must have had the ancient town as its model. We learn then, from the record of Messer Marco Polo, that "the city was four square," and "the streets so straight and wide that you can see right along them. And up and down the city there are beautiful palaces. . . All the plots of ground on which the houses of the city are built are four square and laid out with straight lines, all the plots being occupied by great and spacious palaces with courts and gardens of proportionate size. And thus the whole city is arranged in squares, just

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

like a chessboard and disposed in a manner so perfect and masterly that it is impossible to give a description that should do it justice."

Along the main wide street, raised in the centre and with its stones overlaid by the dust of ages, as remarkable then as since for its choking quality and the darkness of its colour, due to the prevalence of coal in the neighbourhood, passed the wonderstruck Mongol envoys.

China does not change. Overhead pigeons wheeled in the keen air, each carrying beneath its tail a variously tuned instrument that caused a perpetual sound of musical humming. The thoroughfare swarmed with humanity and animals. Mules and ponies pulled the country carts. Sweating labourers pushed their heavily laden wheelbarrows. Scholars and aristocrats were carried in sedan chairs. Pedestrians swung by at a steady pace on business or on pleasure bent. And the tumult of all this activity deafened ears accustomed to the peace of the Mongolian Steppes.

Then, as ever, the capital was a city of walls, such walls as Temudjin had once dreamed about.

The Chinese, in obedience to the Confucian maxim not to arouse envy by displaying wealth, enclosed their culture like a precious jewel with jealous care. Behind the mighty outer ramparts, high walls hid their palaces and their gardens and, in the centre of all, the abode of their Emperor conformed to the general rule and was only built on a nobler scale.

Thus, as ever, the Imperial palace and its offices formed a city within the city, the sacred precinct of the Son of Heaven. Rose red was this innermost barrier and passing it the Mongol envoys found themselves in fairyland.

The splendours of that forbidden place under the occupation of the Kins can now only be imagined as probably exceeding those of the imitative succeeding dynasty. Level-

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

led with the dust are the painted walls, the golden roofs and the pavilions of marble and lacquer, obliterated the splendid courts leading through gleaming archways in unexampled vistas to the dwelling of the Emperor ; vanished the carven bridges spanning crystal streams in gardens of enchantment.

Two great lions of celadon porcelain, in duck's egg green, shadowed with violet, each caressing with its right paw a ball of the same faience, guarded an entrance. On an artificial lake sprinkled with water lilies floated an enormous boat of snow-white marble, shaded with awnings of silk needlework. Hangings of scarlet brocade, embroidered with five clawed dragons, gave ingress from corridors into lofty ante-chambers.

And all these beauties were infused by a sense of mystery, that made itself felt in an atmosphere at once secret and malign. The place was not peopled by brilliant courtiers, but in the passages and in the rooms eunuchs, of immense stature and soulless countenance, rustled and whispered and twittered. Engaged in perpetual intrigue theirs was the authority of the palace. Passionless, cold and baleful theirs was the influence that spelt corruption.

That casket of surpassing loveliness, the Imperial city, contained nothing more powerful than the presence of evil. The dominion of the Golden Khan was already dead.

The Mongol envoys were conducted with due ceremony to the audience chamber of Chong-hei. He was not there to receive them and they waited at the end of the vast hall until he should appear.

The marble floor, leading by three steps to a daïs on which stood a throne of carved ivory, was covered with a carpet of yellow silk and hangings of the same colour concealed the walls. On either side was ranged a line of large urns in red lacquer, intricately designed and standing

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

on pedestals of bronze. Behind the throne was a screen of the same lacquer, wrought to represent twisting dragons and a soaring phoenix.

Subtle perfumes and the sounds of distant music filled the air.

Presently from the back of the screen, in each direction came a double troop of fairy-like maidens, scattering flowers and carrying various objects. Their graceful trailing dresses, girdled high beneath their breasts with floating ribbons; their black hair, arranged in elaborate bows and loops adorned with blossoms and jewels above their delicate faces; their exquisite, hovering movements gave them the appearance of a bevy of butterflies. One held a golden basket wreathed with jessamine, in which on a cushion of scarlet damask reposed two lovely puppies, with chestnut coloured coats, like spun silk, sharply pointed ears and curling tails.¹ Another brought an ebony lute, encrusted with pearls and coral and hung with streamers of lavender gauze. A third carried a large fan of gold paper on which the Emperor himself had written a poem.

When these maidens had disposed themselves reclining on the steps, there appeared, from the left side of the screen, a second troop of ladies drawing a small gilded car shaped like a dragon. In the car sat the Son of Heaven, whose luxury had attained a point where none but the fairest and youngest of females were considered worthy to attend him. No rude show of force was permitted to mar the perfection of his surroundings. Not even the soulless eunuchs, plotting and whispering at every approach, might enter his presence.

Chong-hei was a man of middle age with the refined countenance of a Chinese aristocrat. He had a well shaped face, suggesting a texture smooth as porcelain, large lustrous

¹ A painting of the Sung period of puppies shows them resembling toy Pomeranians rather than the modern Pekinese spaniel.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

eyes under strongly marked brows, drooping moustache, revealing a small melancholy mouth and a magnificent pointed beard, that fringed his chin and reached to his waist.

His voluminous robe was of yellow silk, draped in classic folds. His headdress was a scarf of spotted silk, caught back behind the large prominent ears and surmounted by a square black silk board in the nature of a shade, edged all round with heavy crimson fringe. His hands, which he displayed as though in vanity, were small and soft as those of a child and the tapering fingers ended in nails of inordinate length that gleamed like mother-o'-pearl. He wore no jewels. The strange beauty of his garb was above adornment.

When the Emperor had descended from his dragon car and mounted his ivory throne, the Mongol envoys were invited to advance. Their extraordinary appearance evoked smiles among the maidens. Who could expect propriety of demeanour from such foreign devils? They did not even know how to perform the Kow tow.

Their spokesman stood erect at the foot of the steps and delivered the message from Chingiz Khan in a loud voice :

"Of course it has come to your knowledge that we, by Heaven's favour, have been chosen from among all the Mongols to hold the reins of Empire and of guidance. The fame of our conquering host has gone forth and is spreading. We are planting our banners over all the earth's surface and soon every people and all nations will submit, without delay or hesitation, to our prosperous direction and share in its many benefactions. But should any rise and resist, their houses, goods, property and dependants will be ruined without mercy. Praise and honour to high Heaven, our dominion is so well ordered that we can visit China. With us will go instruments of every sort and crushing weapons. With us will march an army which is like a roaring ocean. We can meet

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

enmity or friendship with the same tranquil feeling. If the Golden Khan, in wisdom, selects the way of friendship and concord and meets us in congress, we will secure to him the management of China in proper form and strong possession. If he cannot come himself, let him send his honoured sons to us as hostages with treasures. But should he resist, which Heaven forbid, we must wait for warfare and for slaughter, which will last till Heaven puts the diadem of victory and power on the head of whom it chooses, and puts the rags of misery and want on him whom it desires to wear them."¹

Several of the ladies swooned away.

The Emperor choked and beckoned feebly for his dragon car with one hand, while he waved the other in a gesture of dismissal to the envoys. The Mongols, lacking even the courtesy to withdraw, stood their ground and grinned.

With faint cries of distress, the maidens hastened to remove the Golden Khan. When he had gone, a band of eunuchs hurried from a doorway and forcibly hustled the barbarians from the sacred precincts.

Once beyond the atmosphere of peace and pleasure into which they had cast so frightful a bolt, the envoys were subjected to indignity and injury and were forced to flee the city for their lives.

¹ Curtin.

CHAPTER XI

BEFORE Chingiz moved against the continent of the Chinese Empire, he went up a high mountain and on its summit opened his coat, put his girdle round his neck and once more called on Heaven for aid.

"Oh ! boundless Power that controls the universe, I go to avenge my relatives whom in the past the Golden Khan put to death with torture. Send help from on high ! Inspire men to follow me. Direct good spirits to fight on my side and allow evil ones to encompass mine enemies and bring them to defeat !"

And he came down from that place with such a light in his blue eyes and such purpose in his bearing that all men wondered. Then leaving his homeland in the charge of his brother Udjughen, he set forth on his great enterprise, accompanied by his four sons, Juchi, whom he had adopted, and Ogotai, Jagatai and Tului, whom he loved as his own.

His tremendous army started on a journey of twelve hundred miles, partly across the desert of Gobi or Sha-mo. Descending the marginal mountains that wall in the Mongolian plateau, they followed the slope that gradually centres on that vast depression, which is probably the dry bottom of an inconceivably ancient salt lake.

Once on a time long prior to present increasing desiccation, the water courses that then scored the northern rocky ridges must have drained into this area. Now it is a haunted waste, where in the perpetual fog of dust, raised by the prevailing wind, rocks and tamarisk mounds take the forms of men erect and crouching beasts, eerie kettle-

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

drums are heard beating in the darkness, and the bells of ghostly caravans tempt lonely travellers to wander from their route.

It was just as strange, just as gloomy, just as terrible when the Mongols went that way. But undeterred, unshaken in its resolution, the stern host went forward, its decimal units bound together by iron discipline and comprising only mounted warriors. Every soldier wore armour and helmet of raw hide, overlaid with lacquered iron plates. Every man carried a lance, a sabre, an axe, a bow and a quiver. Numberless spare horses followed the riders and immense herds of cattle were driven in the rear. The materials for siege engines, to be assembled later, were carried in carts.

They approached at last the frontier of the province of Shan-si.

That mountainous country, whose broken ranges running south-west and north-west form the buttresses of the Mongolian plateau where it falls into the plain of Chih-li and appear from thence as a barrier defending the centre of China from the incursions of man or nature, was the last point at which an invasion might have been expected. The mountains which shelter and irrigate Chih-li on the eastern side, present on the western side an equally formidable face and the Great Wall running at their base seems to have temporarily forfeited its function.

Beyond the Wall tributary streams and lakes of the Yellow River were then surrounded by a swampy region where pearl mussels were found, and, in the time of the Mongols, a high palisade of willows traversed these bogs, forming an outer protection to the Wall itself.

The reason for this apparently unnecessary defence may have been that the Chinese, accustomed to use all waterways within their country, were determined to leave no

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

chance of ingress to the barbarians. Before the palisade could be pierced, the alarm would certainly be given on the Wall. When the Mongols reached this place, however, the season was winter and the waters were frozen.

Chingiz, who commanded the centre of his army, drew up his troops on the ice and the palisade hid their movements, while preparations went forward for penetrating that formidable defence. Not a man in the army doubted that somehow the great Khan would find a way to lead them into the promised land.

The Wall, where it skirted Shan-si, was garrisoned by warriors of the Ongut tribe, people familiar to the district but akin to the Mongols.

Their commander, Ala Kush Tegin,¹ had looked for advancement to the influence of wealthy relations and Imperial favour, but he had been disappointed of all his hopes. A sojourn in Chih-li had shown him that, even as an officer, his social rank was not equal to that of any civilian official, since the profession of arms was despised by people who esteemed scholarship above every virtue and peace above every condition. His relations had accumulated wealth by adopting the respectable vocations of agriculture or merchandise and were inclined to despise Ala Kush for not having followed their example. He had little learning and was proud, uncouth and impetuous. With his vanity inflamed by disdain and caring nothing for the etiquette of cities, he dared to aspire to the hand of a mandarin's daughter in Tai-teng Fu.

¹ It must be confessed at once that the true story of Ala Kush Tegin, chieftain of the Onguts, has here been embroidered. As an historical character, he is recorded to have betrayed his trust, having been bought over by the Mongols, with whom he was akin. As, however, Chingiz invariably rewarded treachery as it deserved, and we do not hear of the ultimate fate of Ala Kush, there is, perhaps, some excuse for showing him in a more favourable light.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Chancing to see the maiden one day, as she was carried through the street in her chair, he had surrendered his heart at the first glance and, without consulting his family, had straightway made a proposal to her father, to whom he had never been introduced.

Everyone was horrified. The relations of Ala Kush Tegin sent abject apologies to the official and instructed the boor who threatened them all with disgrace that his offence had been heinous.

The mandarin could, however, afford to be generous. Without deigning a reply to the insolent proposal, which had not even been accompanied by the presents enjoined by etiquette, he caused the immediate removal of the young man from the neighbourhood by procuring him a post of authority on the frontier, which amounted to exile. On the night before his departure, Ala Kush climbed the wall of the mandarin's garden, threw a ball of yellow silk, concealing a letter addressed to the lady, into the courtyard of the women's apartments; then, assuming delight at the thought of returning to his homeland and of commanding an outpost composed of his countrymen, he spat on the dust of cities and rode away.

No one at that time contemplated the possibility of war. Even when the ultimatum was delivered and succeeded by the mobilisation of a standing army, the civilian population were well assured that this army would never need to take the field, since the Wall afforded an impregnable protection against any barbarian host.

Time passed and Ala Kush Tegin was forgotten with the utmost relief by his relations.

Meanwhile negotiations went forward for the marriage of the mandarin's daughter to an approved suitor. Whether the lady found the ball of yellow silk and received the letter from Ala Kush cannot be known. It is more probable that,

170

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

urged by caprice, she departed from propriety and filial obligation so far as to desire some sight of the world before committing herself to obey an unknown husband. Be that as it may, she escaped from her father's house in the dress of a gardener's boy and, joining a caravan that took supplies and despatches to the frontier, rode out on an ass to see the Wall.

She paid dearly for the enterprise. Coincidence, more remarkable in fact than in fiction, caused an encounter between herself and Ala Kush, who was incapable of forgetting. He lured the unsuspecting and disguised lady into his quarters, declared his passion and swore that he would never let her go. Appalled by the turn her adventure had taken, she found herself a prisoner in the hands of a stranger and, on the departure of the caravan, she abandoned hope.

Ala Kush, however, treated her with respect. His quickly formulated plan was to win honour and renown by his defence of the Wall, which might gain him in the near future a post of dignity as the governor of a city. Then, by the gradual accumulation of wealth, he would be in a position to claim the hand of the lady, whom he would restore unharmed to her bereaved parent, before the world. He justified this idea to his own conscience, by pretending that she ran a greater risk roaming the country at large in its unsettled state.

He dismissed his own servant, on the pretext of employing a boy recommended by his relations, and installed the mandarin's daughter in his own apartment with as much comfort as he could command. The soldier servant, enraged by his dismissal, deserted the Wall a few nights later on the western side.

The garrison was aware of the enemy's approach and all precautions were taken against surprise. The labourers, who brought daily supplies of fuel in the shape of brushwood bundles and logs for the use of the fortress, were never allowed

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

to enter the gate tower without producing permits signed by the commandant.

The warning bonfires were stacked, ready to be ignited by flint and steel on the Wall. The sentries stood to their appointed posts night and day. Early one morning one of the fuel carriers was dragged before Ala Kush.

"This man has his permit, Lord, but he is not known to us and he approached from the west."

"He is a spy," said Ala Kush. "Kill him."

"Nay, lord," protested the peasant. "Last week I lay on the Wall. One evening I dropped down and went to hunt for pearl mussel in the marshes. I knew the danger but poverty drove me with a spur. I have collected great treasure, lord, and I will sell it all to you for one piece of silver."

"Fool," said Ala Kush, "I can take the treasure and your life too. Where are the pearls?"

"They are hidden, lord, in the reeds. Promise me my life and I will fetch them."

"Why did you not bring them?"

"Because I feared to be shot as I approached from that side, in which case I should have lain where I dropped and the pearls would have been lost. As I carried a bundle of brushwood on my back the sentry spared me till I could be examined."

Impelled by the desire to accumulate wealth, Ala Kush sent the peasant under guard of two soldiers to collect the treasure. If the soldiers fell into an ambush and did not return, the commandant did not care.

There was no ambush. The peasant returned, carrying a pouch of leather and Ala Kush admitted him to his own quarters to count the pearls.

They entered a room where a small and delicate figure, dressed in the blue cotton clothes of a boy, stood looking

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

through a loophole. The listless figure did not move to notice their presence. As he dropped the pearls one by one into the hand of Ala Kush the peasant drew attention to their value.

"Remark the sheen of this one, lord. Would you not say it came of an oyster? Here is another, black and very rare, worth much fine gold. And here is one flushed with rose like the cheek of a woman. . . . If it should be known that Ala Kush Tegin had a woman in his eye while he guarded the Wall, he would not gain much honour from his guardianship."

The commandant raised his hands to the man's throat and found a knife at his own. The figure at the loophole turned with a stifled cry.

"Utter a sound and you are both dead," said the peasant. "The servant of Ala Kush has revealed the indiscretion of his master to those who know how to profit by human weakness. If no fire is lighted on the watch tower to-night, Ala Kush shall prosper exceedingly and a pearl of great price, finer than any from a mussel shell, shall be the token of his reward."

"The beacon shall burn," said Ala Kush.

At the same moment a pair of strong young arms were flung round his body from the back.

"Strike," said the woman. "His death for my liberty."

"Nay," answered the man. "Courage deserves life," and before Ala Kush could break away, he ran through the door and leapt from the Wall.

A shower of arrows pursued him as he sped westward, but he escaped.

The woman stooped to the floor and picked up the scattered pearls. These she knotted in a corner of her coat. Then, beneath the loophole, she caught the gleam of another stone. It was larger and finer than all the rest and no mussel shell

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

had ever contained it. She examined it and knew that the spy must have deliberately thrown it into that corner before his flight.

Turmoil reigned in the watch tower. Word was sent to the neighbouring garrisons on either side to hold themselves in readiness for the warning beacon, if an attack was launched on the Wall that night. Every man was busy examining his arms and the story of the spy's temerity passed from mouth to mouth, with the conjecture that the permit of the fuel carrier must have been stolen from the body of one who had dared to go out into the marshes, seeking shell fish for food.

The woman found an opportunity to approach the pile of brushwood prepared for the bonfire. She heard an order given that it should be drenched with oil to ensure a brighter flame. While the soldier who guarded it hastened to obey this command, she sped back into the room, found a pitcher of water and flung it over the fuel. When the oil was brought she told the man that the work had already been done and pointed to the wet sticks to confirm her statement. He, knowing her to be the commandant's personal servant, believed her words and left the second pitcher in her keeping. She contrived to exchange it for another containing water.

There was no attack that night. Every watch tower along a mile's frontage remained for about a week in a state of keen suspense. During that time, the woman found repeated opportunities to water the brushwood pile. Though she had betrayed her hatred to Ala Kush in a moment of passion he did not suspect her, for what had she to gain by treachery ?

He was incapable of imagining ignorance that had no conception of the meaning of war, and the singleness of purpose, whereby a woman could desire nothing but revenge and liberty, was beyond his wildest dreams.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

In the mind of the lady, the barbarians were people only a little less educated than her own and probably superior to Ala Kush. Their penetration of the Wall might surely spell her salvation and she envisaged a ceremonious interview between their victorious leader and herself.

"Honourable lady, to whose courage we owe success, how can we serve you?"

"Honourable sir, permit me to return the pearl left in my keeping by your messenger and grant me two favours; first to know that Ala Kush has paid the penalty of crime and secondly an escort to take me to my father."

At last the alarm of the garrison waned. It was considered that no spy would have revealed the point of attack and that accordingly this was the last place on which it would be directed.

A large force of Mongols crept out from the marshes and broke through the willow palisade, under cover of darkness, immediately before the watch tower of Ala Kush. As soon as they were detected, a gong gave the signal for the kindling of the beacon. It could not be lighted. Fresh brushwood was piled on the old heap and drenched with liquid from the pitchers. A thin wisp of smoke, almost invisible in the black night, was all that arose.

By the time the defenders realised their failure, the Mongols were attacking the gates.

Neighbouring watch towers hearing the tumult sent contingents to investigate the trouble and lit their own bonfires. The delay, engendered by confusion as to the locality of the threatened point, resulted in disaster. After a short and bitter engagement, the Onguts and their comrades were beaten by overwhelming numbers and the Mongols forced their way through the gate. Having pierced the Wall, nothing now could stop them.

In the upper room of the watch tower stood a boyish

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

figure. There was no light here. She bent her head and listened to the amazing sounds of war. Suddenly the door burst open. A man stood before her, on the shadowy threshold, looking back over his shoulder, so that she could not see his face.

"Take me to your commander," she cried. "I hold the token of betrayal, given as guarantee of great reward. It is I who have served you this night. And, in return for my service, I desire first the death of Ala Kush Tegin and secondly safe conduct for myself to the city of Tai-ting Fu."

The man entered the room and she saw that it was Ala Kush himself. His face and hands were dark with wet blood. He took her neck between those wet hands and bent that wet face over hers.

"Woman," he said, "through you and for you, wars are made. I thank Heaven that, when I was tempted, I loved my duty better than the wealth that might have bought you."

And he broke her neck like a bird's, and laid her body down, and went out and died fighting.

The centre of the Mongol army, led by Chingiz, poured through the narrow ravines that pierce the mountains of Shan-si and broke into the fertile valleys beyond, where fields of barley, wheat and millet, together with orchards and vineyards, flourish in the rich loess.

The blossoming trees of early Spring made of the country a veritable Flowery Land, but with the coming of the Mongols it became a place of desolation. Panic went before them, triumph rode at their side, in their wake they left ruin.

Truly had Chingiz likened the forces under his command to an ocean. China's Sorrow, the Yellow River, periodically changing its course in full flood and bringing death

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

and disaster to thousands, could not be more fearful than they.

While Chingiz profited by the weakness of Ala Kush Tegin, the left wing of the army, led by Chebé Noyan, a general of whom more will be heard hereafter, broke through the Wall at another point, probably by the help of Bortai's relations—the Koungrad tribe, who formed part of its garrison. He then advanced, plundering the country to within a few miles of the city of Liao yang Chou, or Tun-king, the Eastern Court. The right wing, under Juchi, Ogotai and Jagatai, took a southward direction.

Chingiz, with his youngest son Tului, swiftly invaded the Chih-li plain and captured several important towns. Then he went on to Jehol, passing through the Ku-pei K'ou gate of the Great Wall north-east of Chung Tu.

Near this place the Kin army, numbering four hundred thousand and amazingly ignorant that the Wall had already been forced at two points and that they were to be taken in the rear, was encamped. This army had in fact never expected to be actively engaged. Most of its warriors were more accustomed to the atmosphere of cities than to the ardours of a campaign. Its generals did not even know the contours of the country and were obliged to seek information about the routes from local peasantry, who mocked them in return saying, "We know all the rivers, the brooks and their banks."¹

A multitude of councils prevailed and among them the words of the commander-in-chief, whose wish was doubtless father to his thought, received less attention than they deserved.

"If we act with judgment," he said, "the enemy is surely delivered into our hands. His horses must be weary

¹ Cahun.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

and his men must be demoralised by the sack of various towns. Let us attack promptly, before they can recover."

But Ming-gnan, a Chinese general, was better informed. He knew that the constitution of the barbarians and their beasts was like fine steel, preserved from rust by foresight and order. Fear filled his heart and he deserted with his troops and joined Chingiz, bringing news of the plan of battle.

The conqueror straightway seized his advantage, fell on the Kin army and routed one division. Then he followed the retreating forces to the fortress of Hoiho Pu and cut them to pieces.

K'ai-fêng Fu, the winter residence of the Emperor, was now invested and the expedition under Chebé pressed on to the frowning walls of Chung Tu, where the Son of Heaven still remained.

The continuous success of the invasion struck terror like a shaft to the breast of the Golden Khan. He wanted to fly southwards, but his butterfly maidens, guessing shrewdly enough for all their innocence, what would be their fate if they fell into the hands of the barbarians, deterred him from his purpose. It was they who brought him the joyful tidings, true for once, that K'ai-fêng Fu was holding out and that Chingiz himself had been wounded before the walls and had personally retired to the desert.

Yet the situation was grave enough. Lyuko, a prince of the dispossessed Khitan dynasty, determined to improve the opportunity for his own advantage and joined forces with the Mongol army. Together they defeated the Kin troops again, and Lyuko, gathering many supporters to his side, proclaimed himself King of Liao and vassal of Chingiz Khan.

And while the war went forward, the eunuchs of the Imperial palace plotted and whispered together. . . .

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

The commandant of the Imperial troops in Chung Tu was called Hushaku. He was an elderly man who preferred the pleasures of peace to the alarms of war. He was, moreover, the friend of eunuchs and had no conception of honour. Consequently he turned a deaf ear to the rumours of danger which threatened the city, and gave himself up to amusement.

His behaviour earned the contempt and suspicion of Tuktani, the civilian governor, an official of superior education, and at last Tuktani took it upon himself to report the scandal to the Emperor. He offered proof that Hushaku neglected his duties and passed his time in hunting and feasting with a company of fair ladies, who were his only attendants.

The Son of Heaven, who had this prerogative, dismissed Hushaku from office and the commandant was accordingly enraged against Tuktani and planned revenge. Hushaku gave out that the governor was disloyal to the reigning house and that he was rousing rebellion, which must be repressed by force. To lend colour to the report, his soldiers rushed through the streets of the city, proclaiming that Mongol horsemen had already appeared within the outer walls. How could this have happened unless the dwellers in the suburbs, under Tuktani's jurisdiction, had failed to give the alarm?

The people, frenzied with terror, began to attack one another and only ceased, to join in a cry for the governor's blood.

"Where is Tuktani? Where is the traitor who has sold us? Let him be chopped into small pieces! Let the dogs eat his flesh!"

Hushaku appeared, riding calmly in his chair along the crowded thoroughfare. He was greeted with acclamations, which were redoubled when he made known his intention

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

to interview Tuktani personally and discover the truth. He went to the house of Tuktani, who, believing that he came to seek counsel and not suspecting his action, received him courteously.

The two men were closeted together in the utmost privacy. The commandant, a gross and malignant figure in his voluminous robe of ceremony, with feet encased in high felt soled boots, planted firmly apart on the ground, sat opposite the governor, who was a smaller and more venerable man, dressed with taste and distinction in flowing silk. The conversation, conducted with all the forms prescribed by etiquette, had already lasted over an hour.

"I am enchanted to find," said Hushaku heavily, rising at last, "that we are of one mind on the essential point of the need to safeguard all approaches to the city."

"I am consoled to know," answered Tuktani, "that courage can inspire caution," and, remaining seated, he bowed with a cold demeanour.

Hushaku made to move towards the door, paused, lurched quickly against the governor's chair and drove a dagger into Tuktani's heart.

"Oh ! shameless," gasped the dying man, "you shall perish with less honour."

Hushaku went out of the house and cried with a loud voice as he entered his chair, "The traitor is dead ! This hand has struck a blow to save the Empire ! To the palace and to the protection of the Son of Heaven !"

Then, amid the joyful shouts of the crowd, who followed him in an ecstatic throng, he rode to the Imperial city and reported his deed to the Emperor in such terms that Chong hei was obliged to express approval.

Thus established in favour and popularity, he contrived next to replace the guards at the gateways of the rose red wall with his own soldiers and, safe from observation, took

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

up his quarters within the palace, where he continued to intrigue with his friends the eunuchs.

The even tenor of Chong-hei's existence was disturbed. He heard alarming news of the invasion of his kingdom, he was virtually a prisoner within his own domain, and he was obliged daily to attend to affairs of state and to give audience to men, when all he wanted was to be left in peace with his butterfly maidens. At last one day he escaped to a pavilion of marble, overlooking his water garden, where the ladies had carried him in the gilded dragon car. He dismissed them all with his anxieties, while he sat there, before a lacquered table, and gave his mind to the composition of a poem. A scroll of new white silk lay before him, with a pen brush of fine camel hair and an ink slab of porcelain. One white peony, faintly stained with rose, the subject of his verse, engaged his contemplation.

He began to write. The sunlight, filtering through the arching branches of bamboo, seemed to sprinkle gold dust on the table. Dragon flies hovered over the lily leaves on the water. Aware of nothing but the beauty of his surroundings, he did not hear a footfall behind him, nor the sound of a whisper which was not that of trees stirred by the breeze.

An eunuch crept into the pavilion unobserved. Concealed in his hands was a strong cord knotted into a noose.

Suddenly Chong-hei felt something tight round his throat. He choked and dropped his brush. The world turned black. . . .

The garrotter, having made sure that his deed was accomplished, hastened away to inform Hushaku, the instigator of the crime.

In the whole palace there was only one person who remained loyal to Chong-hei. She, the Keeper of the Imperial Seal, refused to deliver it to the traitors and chose rather to share the fate of her master.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Chong-hei was succeeded on the Imperial throne by his brother, Utubu, who, a weaker creature even than himself, was content to leave the reins of government in the hands of the commandant.

The city of Chung Tu was now imminently threatened by the advance of the Mongols under Chebé Noyan, and it was found necessary to dispatch a Chinese general called Kaoki to intercept the enemy.

Hushaku, alive at last to peril, threatened Kaoki before he started that he would forfeit his life on the report of defeat. Kaoki, rendered desperate by this warning, took care to escape when he found himself overpowered by the Mongols and returned secretly to the city, with the intention of forestalling fate. Responsibility for disaster now fell on the commandant and, while assuming ignorance, he made hasty preparation for departure.

On a dark night he crept from his house, carrying as much treasure as he could in a bag slung round his neck, and attempted to climb the rose red wall. He reached the top, waited and listened. All was very still. The guards were at the gate. No one—unless it might have been those busy eunuchs—suspected the movements of Hushaku. Carefully he let himself down on the other side. It was a long drop for a stout man. Dared he risk it? If only there had been some one to help him.

There was. His legs were roughly seized—he was prone on the ground, brutal soldiery bent over him: By the light of a lantern he saw Kaoki's face, pale and dreadful, and he saw a naked sword in Kaoki's hand.

"Die, murderer!" said Kaoki and his uplifted sword descended.

Hushaku's severed head was carried in triumph to the Emperor.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

"Shall the body of a rogue be buried whole and with honour, or shall it be disgraced with mutilation?"

Utubu, trembling, gave orders that the head of Hushaku should by no means be reattached to the corpse, whereby his ancestors in the next world would eternally fail to recognise him.¹

At the same time he transferred his favour to Kaoki, with willing pardon.

But already Chingiz had returned to the field of war. His triumphs in the south and west, where he had been aided by the dominion of Tangut seeking revenge for the defection of its former ally, the Kin Emperor, had been unceasing and immense.

The mountains and valleys of Shan-si, the plain of Chih-li and the great country of Shan-tung, home of ancient Chinese philosophy and birthplace of Confucius—all this enormous region now acknowledged his power. Ninety cities had been taken and sacked and only nine had escaped destruction through the courage of their defence. The booty that the Mongols had seized was incalculable and Chingiz was prepared to rest on his laurels.

His armies assembled then west of Chung Tu and Chebé Noyan was called in from further advance on the central capital. Two officers were despatched to parley with the Emperor Utubu and carried the following message:

"All places north of the Hoang ho (Yellow River) are mine, save Chung Tu, which is all that remains to you. Heaven has reduced you to this impotence. Were I to harass you further, I should dread Heaven's anger. Will you treat my army well and satisfy the generals?"

¹ To avoid this disgrace and to insure immortal identity to the dead, relatives of criminals who have been decapitated will pay large sums for the retrieval of the head that it may be sewn to the neck. The greatest punishment in China, therefore, is that which enjoins irretrievable mutilation, the Death By a Thousand Cuts.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

There could be but one answer to a demand made under such circumstances.

Utubu, like his late brother, desired nothing but peace. In exchange for the safety of the city and of his own person, he agreed to surrender everything that was required. Cartloads of gold, silver and jewels were delivered to the conqueror. Three thousand horses went to swell the Mongol herds. And with these treasures went objects more precious still—a Princess of China, the daughter of Chong-hei, to be the bride of Chingiz, and in her train five hundred noble youths and five hundred butterfly maidens, the flower of the city.

CHAPTER XII.

THE miserable Utubu, having lost everything but his life, dreaded that this might yet be taken from him. On the conclusion of peace, therefore, he decided to move from Chung Tu to the southern capital of K'ai-fêng Fu. He left his son in the abandoned city and set forth with an escort of Kara Khitans, supplied by Chingiz.

As they proceeded, however, his own followers made an attack on these warriors, and attempted to deprive them of their weapons. The Kara Khitans, though few in number, were more than a match for the Chinese. They promptly chose one of their force for a leader and galloped towards Chung Tu, overcoming every resistance that they encountered and sending messengers to inform Chingiz of what had happened.

The great Khan never forgave a breach of faith. He at once sent two divisions under able generals to capture the central capital. The son of Utubu escaped and joined his father, and Utubu sent forth from K'ai-fêng Fu a large relieving army and an enormous transport of supplies.

It was too late. The army was intercepted by the Mongols, its commander was killed and the whole transport was lost.

The supremacy of the Kins had now received its death blow. Their remaining forces dispersed and the peace-loving Chinese returned in the south to the cultivation of their rice fields, in the north to their crops of millet and wheat.

But the inhabitants of Chung Tu were made of sterner

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

stuff. In that beleaguered city there were parents who could not live and surrender to those who had robbed them of their children, parents who could not die happily in their homes since they would leave none to worship at their ancestral tablets. All that was left for them was to continue a bare existence, in a twilight illumined by the dim hope that they might yet renew their families. The dreadful forcing house of want offered a chance of salvation in making them fruitful.

Connection with Chung Tu was severed and a frightful siege began. The Mongols, in possession of the suburbs, brought up their rudely constructed engines. Millstones were hurled from catapults and liquid fire from ballistas. The defenders enforced the wooden gate towers with huge bags of felt filled with straw and horsedung and with planks faced with the untanned hides of buffaloes. But, despite these precautions, the timbers were broken and in many cases began to burn. The great grey walls remained as impregnable then as they proved to be seven centuries later against the bombardment of modern artillery.

One day the garrison had recourse to a terrifying device, equally unknown to the Mongols and to western nations of that time. From the ramparts steel pots were let down on strong chains. When they touched the ground, the pots burst with a terrific noise and their fragments flying in all directions caused grievous wounds to any that they struck. Sometimes their force would decapitate or disembowel a man on the spot ; more often small splinters buried themselves deep in the flesh and set up a poisonous inflammation. If the pot failed to burst, as occasionally happened, it was examined by the bravest among the Mongols and was found to contain a fine black powder and an ingenious device for causing a long wisp of flaring tow to

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

come in contact with this substance at the moment that the receptacle hit the earth. Having mastered the secret of the composition of the powder, the Mongols made free use of it, and it became from henceforth one of their weapons.

Another invention of the defenders were spears carrying rockets or some sort of firework, which being hurled from the walls, burned everything within a distance of thirty feet. Boiling oil and molten lead were also thrown from cauldrons on to the heads of any who attempted to approach with scaling ladders, and, when the supply of lead failed, the defenders melted all available metal, copper and silver and even gold, and poured it out like water.

Every missile that the mind of man could suggest, arrows, javelins and stones; every horror that the imagination of man could conceive, liquid fire, poisonous fumes, exploding bombs, made that struggle between two determined peoples day by day more fearful. Kettledrums thundered and trumpets blared defiance. The stench of rotting carcasses, men and beasts, filled the air.

Death, like a baleful dragon with pale and evil eyes and slaving jaws, encircled the doomed city.

Hunger stalked abroad in the streets of Chung Tu. Ma-chung, the merchant, lived in a house near one of the western gates. Poverty had overtaken him in his old age and misery had dogged his footsteps since his only son had departed from propriety to become a soldier and had earned the violent end of that despised class. Ma-chung had taken a new wife, but she remained barren, and this although he did not fail to try and save her body from the evil spirit which undoubtedly possessed it with constant beatings.

Near the house of Ma-chung was the poor dwelling of Lu-chow, the carpenter. Ma-chung still had a respectable abode, but he was destitute, having no heir. Lu-chow had

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

no more than a hut and was clothed in rags, but he was rich beyond the dreams of avarice in the possession of a man child. His wife was young and fair and might easily present him with more sons. Lu-chow worked hard to provide food for these two precious beings and often went without a meal himself to supply them with nourishment.

The day came, however, when he had spent his last cash and could not find further employment. The child, Wen-li, was crying with hunger and the mother looked desperately to her husband. Lu-chow went forth to borrow of his neighbour Ma-chung.

Ma-chung was no longer stout. His smooth cheeks were pale and flabby. He already felt the pinch of circumstances.

"I have nothing to give you," he said to Lu-chow. "Since yesterday I have fasted except for two rats caught in my cellar."

Lu-chow, who had no cellar where rats might be caught and had dined on soup made from the boiling of an old leather strap, answered, "I do not seek for myself but for my wife and for my son, the admirable young Wen-li. If life can be kept in that small body, the appetite of which is very great, who knows to what proportions it may grow? The survival of Wen-li is of the utmost importance, since his attainments are even now remarkable and he will undoubtedly rise to high distinction."

These remarks were as gall and wormwood to the jealous soul of Ma-chung. He hated the fortunate Lu-chow, and wished to quench his pride.

"I have heard," he said, "that there is still money to be made in the city. But the business is not one to which an honest man would gladly lend himself. A great wastage of valuable material is taking place. I refer to the loss of life on the walls. While he exists the soldier is of some use.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Dead he is no more than carrion. It appears that certain people, devoid of sentiment, are prepared to utilise this carrion for practical purposes, since they know a way of extracting fat and salt from human flesh and they are willing to pay a price for corpses. Though such traffic offends my susceptibilities, adversity does not permit scruples, and if you will collect bodies and bring them to me, I will see that you are rewarded for the disgusting labour."

Lu-chow agreed. He was a man of little education and his natural thrift and common sense did not forbid him to countenance a scheme that appeared economic and reasonable. His gentle disposition would have made him shrink from strife or murder. But when the vital spark was extinct why should not the chemical ingredients of the human frame be turned to some account? He had no idea of the real end to which the bodies were destined. He had no suspicion that Ma-chung was already deeply engaged in the horrible traffic and that there was a store of food in the merchant's cellars as a result of nefarious gain. At night he took his wheelbarrow to the walls and brought in newly killed men to the house of Ma-chung.

Ma-chung had warned him that he must be secretive, since the business was not generally acknowledged and that none but fresh corpses were required. Therefore Lu-chow did not tell his wife and went out under cover of darkness. He pretended that he had found employment as a scavenger, which he felt to be the truth.

Once more there was rice in his hovel and even an occasional pinch of tea. The young Wen-li waxed fat and beautiful and played in the street with a streamer of red paper.

At last the appalling truth came to the ears of Lu-chow. Although no animals remained to be slaughtered there was meat to be bought in certain low quarters of the city. Luckily, Lu-chow and his family had not tasted any form

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

of meat for many moons, but when he realised the nature of that which was offered for sale, he was free for a time of hunger.

He went no more to the walls and avoided the house of Ma-chung. One day, however, the two men met in the road.

"I have not seen you of late," said Ma-chung. "Has necessity ceased to inspire diligence?"

Lu-chow put his mouth close to the merchant's ear. "Outcast!" he whispered. "Dog! Unclean and abominable Thing!"

Finally he spat out an insult, at any time calculated to wound, but under the circumstances frightful. "And you whose son was a soldier!"

This indictment caused seven devils to enter into the soul of Ma-chung, which was already swept and garnished to receive them. The names of the devils were envy, hatred, lust, cruelty, cunning, despair and madness, and they were brothers.

He approached the wife of Lu-chow, who did not know his character, when her husband was absent from the hut. He showed her kindness and gave her millet which she accepted thankfully.

"See," she said, when Lu-chow returned, "how generous is our neighbour, the worthy Ma-chung."

Lu-chow threw the good millet into the gutter. "Take nothing from Ma-chung," he commanded. "Above all never allow him to tempt you with meat."

But he would not explain his meaning.

The child wept for the dinner he had been promised. The mother also wept, and when Lu-chow had gone out again she went and gathered up the food out of the dust and washed it and gave Wen-li to eat, feeling that she was justified, since such an unwarrantable action could only have been the result of ill-humour.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Lu-chow failed to find employment or any sustenance. Then he fell ill of a fever.

Ma-chung came again to the hut and brought a small present of tea, worth many times its weight in gold.

"I am forbidden to take it," said the wife of Lu-chow, with tears in her eyes, and some of these tears were of gratitude for the self-denial of the merchant and some were of personal regret.

"The unfortunate Lu-chow suffers from pride," said Ma-chung "and if he had only himself to consider this would be a virtue. In these days it is incumbent on us to help each other. By accepting my poor gift, you can soften the heart of your husband, which his own want has hardened against me, and induce him once more to regard me as a friend."

When Lu-chow tasted the tea and found his fever abated but his judgment weakened, he joined with his wife in praising Ma-chung. And when he was restored to health, through food regularly supplied by the merchant, he was ready like many other miserable beings in that most miserable city to see that famine knows no law. So long as he and his wife did not starve, the degradation of others left him callous. He lived safely and meagrely on millet, and accepted the explanation of Ma-chung that his wealth was a remnant of happier days.

Ma-chung was now, however, forced to abandon his loathly business. Bereft of a helper, he found himself too old and weak to take a wheelbarrow to the walls and garner in the dreadful harvest. His supplies of food were diminishing, and the fault lay with Lu-chow, who had added this injury to his insult.

The young Wen-li still played in the street with his streamer of red paper. Ma-chung watched the child from his doorway. The streamer blew away in the wind and

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

fluttered against the merchant's face. Angrily Ma-chung swept it aside and tore it in two.

"Alas!" shrieked Wen-li, "my beautiful ribbon! You have destroyed it utterly! Oh! evil one, extinguisher of joy, fit only to be the father of soldiers!"

And this he said in the tempestuous grief of youth, knowing nothing of the son of Ma-chung, or forgetting the respect due to age.

Under the hand of Ma-chung was a heavy piece of wood. He took it and hurled it at the retreating figure of the child, who was running to tell his troubles to his mother. Wen-li fell on his face and did not move.

The child of Lu-chow was missing and the light of his home was extinguished. In sore anxiety he ran through the city, calling to Wen-li. In bitter trouble he returned at night without his son. Among his neighbours, none showed profounder sympathy than Ma-chung. Next day the merchant joined in the vain search. On the third day Lu-chow sought his son alone and failed to find him. When the unhappy father came back, staggering like one stricken with mortal illness, he found Ma-chung waiting on his threshold.

"Oh! friend," said Ma-chung, "I dwell in the shadow of your adversity. Yet has Heaven mercifully sent a ray of light in the shape of miraculous nourishment to lighten our affliction. As I stood here this morning, a small fat pig, that had doubtless escaped from the house of some rich and miserly glutton, suddenly appeared running along the street. Heaven lent me the power to catch and kill it. Come and feast with me to-night, beloved Lu-chow, and bring your wife!"

"I am in no mood for feasting. I have lost my appetite for meat," muttered the carpenter.

"Nay, but Lu-chow, honourable friend, my heart bleeds for you. Consider your sorrowful wife! Consider also

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

the child whom you will certainly find before long ! Knowing the delicacy of your stomach, I sold the carcass of the pig for a fabulous sum and retained only the choicest portion, the head. When we have eaten our fill of the flesh, you shall take away this head, which will provide your son with soup for many days.' ”

These arguments revived hope and hunger in the mind of Lu-chow. Wen-li had doubtless strayed and found a friend. The idea of once more tasting roasted pig's cheek made him faint with longing. He thanked Ma-chung and promised to bring his wife to dinner.

The house of the hospitable merchant was decorated for the occasion with paper lanterns. Fresh reeds were strewn on the floor of the apartment of ceremony. Incense burned before the ancestral tablets. Ma-chung sat before a table and was joined by his guests. They were served by his wife with tea.

“ It is pleasant to reflect,” said the old man, “ that, while we eat to-night, many other poor people in the city will be able to indulge themselves as well. I have seldom seen a finer piglet. It should feed several families. And while I confess that I made a good bargain in disposing of the carcase, which should keep me from starvation for a little time, I rejoice to think that no one will be the loser.”

Lu-chow congratulated him with appropriate compliments.

“ And now,” proceeded Ma-chung, “ as the moment is singularly auspicious and deserves to be glorified, I will do honour to it by fetching the admirable dish myself.”

He left the room and presently re-entered carrying a large covered platter, which he placed in front of Lu-chow.

“ Before we feast, oh ! friend,” he said softly, and the seven devils danced in his eyes, “ let me propound to you a riddle. Which is better, the father of a soldier or the father of a small fat pig ? ”

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

With these words, standing at Lu-chow's shoulder he removed the cover from the dish. On the platter lay the head of the young Wen-li.

After Lu-chow had killed Ma-chung and the wife of Ma-chung and had burned the house of Ma-chung to the ground, he opened a shop in a low quarter of the city for the sale of meat. His supply was plentiful and, though his customers were few, he quickly became rich.

But when people saw Lu-chow in the street, so decent in his blue cotton clothes, so decorous in his movements, with hands hidden in his sleeves and eyes cast down, they shrieked and ran away.

Fu-sing, who was now the governor of the city, invited Chin-chong, the present commandant, to his house, and before broaching the subject of the visit, entertained him with all that remained of some exquisite tea, a present from the Emperor. The two men took their places ceremoniously, on either side of a black-wood table, in square carved chairs with seats of marble and sipped the golden beverage, strong as wine, which was served in cups of the finest porcelain.

When they had addressed each other with the preliminaries required by etiquette, Fu-sing said, "Unwilling as I am to cast a shadow on this favourable meeting, it may not have escaped your knowledge that conditions in the city are not at this moment happy."

Chin-chong acknowledged the unquestionable fact with outspread hands.

"It is said," continued Fu-sing calmly, "that the people, driven to desperation by famine, are devouring the bodies of the dead."

Chin-chong, whose garden contained a pond still filled

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

with fat carp, one of which had provided him that day with a delicate meal, folded his hands on his stomach with a pensive expression.

"I am told, moreover," said Fu-sing, "that, as it becomes increasingly dangerous to collect bodies below the walls and that, as the flesh of those who have died of starvation or disease is useless, the living are now being killed for food."

"Do not let us distress ourselves with such painful reflections," answered Chin-chong. "This is war. At such a time gross appetites prevail."

"If I thought it would help the people, I would give them my own carcass," said Fu-sing, "though they would find it old and tough. But my desire to save them exceeds the promptings of reason. Our great civilization cannot be allowed to perish. It is impossible to permit men to become like ravening beasts."

"It is war," repeated Chin-chong helplessly. "In order to save his own miserable life a man will sacrifice his soul."

"Yet you must have seen brave deeds performed?"

"Mysteriously and very occasionally one will depart from natural instinct to consider a fellow being. This of course is madness, for to interfere with the fate of another is contrary to sense."

Fu-sing agreed. "The physical being is controlled by its own laws. When it desires its end or when this end is forced on it by circumstances, interference is unjustifiable. But the spirit is subject to a higher law, that of morality, dependent on education. We, who enjoy the advantages of learning, may surely lend some activity to the preservation of ethics."

"All we can do is to set an example," said Chin-chong. "At a time like the present it is useless to order the soul without also ordering the body, and that we allow is im-

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

permissible. To command decency of taste at this moment would be to issue a warrant of universal death."

"That," said Fu-sing, "is what I recommend. Yours, oh ! friend, must be this action, for you are the responsible person. Issue, I beseech you, a general call to arms ! Let the entire population, not excepting the aged, the women and even the children, take weapons in their hands and go forth from every gate of the city against the enemy."

"Impossible !"

"You would be obeyed ! There could be no risk of insurrection. In the human breast there is a spark that despises and consumes the flesh, that counts not the cost of honour. Oh ! worthy Chin-chong, grant to my people this chance of salvation ! Oh ! admirable friend, lift from my shoulders the intolerable burden of shame !"

"This is not my duty !" muttered the commandant.

"Who am I, to reveal to you, the proper path ? Yet are my years more advanced than yours and I will regard you as a son, not to exact obedience but to touch your heart. See, Chin-chong, I will abase myself, I will kneel before you ! Humility becomes the suppliant, generosity is the privilege of the strong."

Hastily Chin-chong raised the governor to his feet. "Estimable Fu-sing," he cried, "you cover me with confusion."

"The clouds of bewilderment can be dispelled by the light of your decision," said Fu-sing.

"Alas ! my thoughts move in impenetrable darkness," answered Chin-chong. "I am utterly confounded by your logic. For if physical constraint be wrong, how can the soul be influenced aright by urging the body to set it free ? These people do not wish to die. On the contrary their degradation proves their will to survive. Any persuasion to fight would therefore be an offence against their liberty."

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

"Do you then refuse my request, oh ! Chin-chong ?"

"Reverend compatriot, I am swayed in one direction by your pleadings and impelled in the other by your arguments. Conscious that the first are dictated by sentiment and that the second are based on knowledge, aware, moreover, that the brain of Fu-sing is greater than his heart, I follow the prompting of reason."

"How admirable," said Fu-sing, resuming his seat, "are the conclusions of a cultured mind !"

"How excellent," said Chin-chong weightily, "is compassion tempered by justice."

"The siege is likely to continue ?" inquired Fu-sing.

"Until we are relieved," answered Chin-chong, looking at the floor.

"Before that can happen there will be no more food in the city."

"I fear the same," replied Chin-chong, thinking of his carp pond. "Let us not, however, meet despair half way."

"That spirit," said Fu-sing, "is already a guest in many houses, which might otherwise share with us the honour of entertaining truth."

"A privilege surely reserved for educated people," said Chin-chong, rising and bowing low.

Fu-sing also rose and returned the bow.

"My one hope, illustrious Chin-chong, is that you may continue to enjoy health."

"Oh ! fount of wisdom, this unworthy tongue will never cease to pray for your prosperity and happiness."

So, with many other felicitous expressions of good will, they parted.

Fu-sing clapped his hands and ordering boiling water to be brought in a covered pot. There was no more tea. Neither was there any more food in the house or money with which it might be purchased. The governor had

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

already given all that remained to him of marketable value to the poor.

When he was served and found himself alone, he proceeded without haste but with an air of relief to lay out on the table a book of the classics and some materials for writing. Then he fetched sticks of fresh incense and lighting them at the fire of coal that burned on his hearth, he set them in vases close to his ancestral tablets and prostrated himself in prayer.

"Oh! benign authors of my being, deign to receive again the gift of life once bestowed on this poor shell. The world has departed from the road of seemliness and has fallen into the ditch of bestiality. Permit me therefore to join your polite company in the abode of bliss."

He then rose and at the table inscribed a few words on a sheet of red paper, which he attached to his breast with a cord of silk. This done, he put a fine white powder from a packet carried on his person in one of the porcelain cups, and poured out a little of the boiling water. Finally seated in comfort, he opened the book and began to read.

"How pleasant," he murmured presently, "are the gardens of learning! How sustaining is the food of the mind."

And lifting the cup, over which there still lingered the fragrance of tea, he gently sipped its contents.

The face of Fu-sing was like carved ivory.

The soul of Fu-sing moved with dignity in the abode of bliss to the sound of music.

On the breast of Fu-sing the red paper proclaimed a warning to the hungry:

"This flesh is poisoned."

Chin-chong went from the house of Fu-sing to the Imperial palace, where certain princesses, the relatives of the Emperor, still remained, preserving an empty pomp. Of

198

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

these ladies, the commandant was now the official guardian. He sought audience of the Dowager Empress, to report that the depleted forces on the city walls could not hold out for longer than another twenty-four hours and therefore the time had come for persons of property to escape under cover of night, before the Mongols forced the gates.

"In your departure you will arrange that we shall accompany you?" said the old lady.

"Have no fear," said Chin-chong. "I will make all preparations for the journey and send word in good time."

"Our honour and our lives are in your hand," she reminded him. "We have complete confidence in your wisdom."

The Princesses, weeping, fell at the feet of Chin-chong, and implored him not to forget them. He comforted them with promises and left the palace.

The ladies then bestirred themselves to collect their jewels and pack them with all portable articles of value.

When this was done, they sat and waited for the message that should come from Chin-chong.

Shadows crept over the room where they waited. A strange stillness reigned. The palace eunuchs and the servitors had fled.

Night descended. The moonlight shone through a window on to the marble floor.

The Dowager Empress slept with drooping head. The young Princesses, in their graceful robes, crouched by her chair and looked to the doorway, with wide expectant eyes. Ghosts seemed to lurk in the darkness. There was a premonition of evil in the scented air.

The long hours wore on.

They knew that they were deserted. The grey dawn found them still waiting. A cold wind blew in through the window. The dowager awoke.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

"I dreamed that we were far from the city," she said.

They listened. At a remote distance there were sounds of terror and anguish, mingled with the mutterings of a rising storm.

"Alas ! alas !" shrieked the princesses. "We are undone. The barbarians are upon us."

Some in the abandonment of grief fell prostrate to the ground. Others rushed from the room.

The dowager sat upright in her chair and her countenance was like a mask of silver.

The storm gathered. Thunderous blows fell on the gates of the Imperial domain. Masonry crashed, yelling voices rose, footsteps ran like hail.

In the dim light of morning, flaming torches waved. The sky was warm with a ruddy glow. Pure surfaces of marble caught and reflected the passionate colour.

There was a trampling of horses' hoofs, a clashing of arms, a bitter shattering of stones. Smoke and noxious odours pervaded the air. The gleaming courtyards, the enchanted gardens were filled with raging demons.

An ethereal figure with fluttering robes flew to a fairy-like bridge and cast herself into the lily pond below.

A group of elegant ladies wound their girdles around their necks and hanged themselves from the rafters of an inner apartment.

The silver faced dowager could not move.

The palace was set on fire. Darkly billowed the clouds of smoke, high rose the flames, loud was the roar of conflagration.

Smash, consume, destroy ! This is war ! Let not one stone remain on another. Show quarter to none ! Feed, feed the ravenous tongues of scarlet and yellow, fan the embers lest they die, pour oil on woodwork, stack straw against the walls ! Here are hangings of silk and scrolls of

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

painted paper. They will burn ! Here are vases of porcelain and ornaments of jade. They will break ! Here are jewels, to be torn from their settings, and spices that may be scattered and boxes of lacquer and ivory to be splintered and bales of gold and silver gauze to be defiled.

And while slaughter and rape and loot went forward, the Empress dowager sat and awaited the flames.

The palace was one vast holocaust. It burned for over a month. The whole city was razed to the ground. Though much treasure had already been surrendered, more remained to be plundered.

Chin-chong, the commandant, having escaped alone, ended his days in security and peace.

CHAPTER XIII

MANY prisoners were taken on the fall of Chung Tu. Among them was the wise and venerable Prince Yeliu Chutsai, a descendant of the Imperial family of the Khitan. He was conducted to Chingiz, who received him with great respect, and at once offered him the highest post in his empire, that of personal adviser or prime minister.

Yeliu Chutsai never afterwards left the great Khan. He accompanied Chingiz on all his future expeditions and recorded the most tremendous of them in a work with the ingenuous title, "Account of a Journey to the West."¹

This fine statesman, described as having had a tall figure and a splendid beard, is one of the outstanding characters of history. He served Chingiz devotedly and his advice was always far-seeing, sound and reasonable.

Another equally famous man of the day was the Taoist monk and sage Ch'ang-ch'un, a native of Shan-tung province, whom Chingiz delighted to honour. In a simple and beautiful letter (too long to be entirely quoted here) the conqueror begged the holy man to come to the Mongol court and expound to him, the Khan, Tao—the Way of Truth.

"I hate luxury and exercise moderation," said Chingiz. "I have only one coat and one food. I eat the same food and am dressed in the same tatters as my humble herdsmen. . . . I have not myself distinguished qualities. . . . But as my calling is high, the obligations incumbent on me are also heavy and I fear that in my ruling there may be something wanting. . . . I inquired and heard that you, Master,

¹ Bretschneider.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

have penetrated the truth and that you walk in the path of right. . . . For a long time you have lived in the caverns of the rocks and have retired from the world, but to you the people who have acquired sanctity repair, like clouds on the path of the immortals. . . . I was always thinking of you. But what shall I do? We are separated by mountains and plains of great extent and I cannot meet you. I can only descend from the throne and stand by the side. . . . I have ordered my adjutant to prepare an escort, and a cart for you. Do not be afraid. I implore you to move your sainted footsteps. . . . Say only one word to me and I shall be happy."

Ch'ang-ch'un, who always called himself modestly "the wild man of the mountains," at first pleaded the excuse of infirmity, but afterwards acceded to a second pressing invitation from Chingiz.

According to one of his disciples the sage was "a man of high perfection. . . . When he sat, his position was immovable, like a dead body; when he stood upright, he resembled a tree; his movements were like the thunder and he walked like the wind." Eventually he travelled to see Chingiz over more than 20,000 *li*¹. . . . "The journey was very painful to him. Nevertheless, he was always cheerful, liked conversation and wrote verses."

In the midst of the excursions and alarms of war, it is pleasant to reflect that Chingiz so appreciated the saintliness of "the wild man of the mountains," that he gave him the title of "The Immortal."

After the fall of Chung Tu, Chingiz left the continuation of the Chinese campaign, which had occupied him for about five years, to his generals.

The road to central China was opened by the capture of

¹ Ten *li* = three miles.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

the Imperial city and the Mongol commander, Samuka, marched at once on the Southern capital of the Kins, K'ai-fêng Fu. His force was, however, too small to pierce the great eastern barrier of the Tung Kwan Gorge, where the Yellow River unites with the Wei between gigantic cliffs of loëss, and after two attempts he was forced to abandon the enterprise.

Encouraged by this respite, the Emperor Utubu invaded the land of his former vassal, the Khitan ruler of Liao, and Chingiz promptly despatched another great general, Mukuli, to re-establish that prince and to subdue the whole northern territory.

Mukuli's first success was enormous though incomplete, and on reporting it he was rewarded by Chingiz with high distinction and the presentation of a chariot and a banner with nine scalops.

"Let this banner," said Chingiz to him, "be an emblem of sovereignty and let the orders issued from under it be obeyed as my own."

Mukuli then set forth once more to wipe the Kin empire from the face of the earth.

But this design was only eventually accomplished after the death of Chingiz. His sons Ogotai and Tului then re-invaded China, and the successor of Utubu, who was called Ninkiassu, met an honourable end on the realisation of defeat, by retiring to an upper room of his palace, setting fire to the building and perishing in the flames. He was the last of the Kins, who had resisted the Mongols altogether for twenty-five years.

The Sung Empire in the South lasted till the new Mongol dynasty was established, when it came to an end under the rule of Kubilai Khan. But that is another story.

Meanwhile other countries occupied the attention of Chingiz.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Periodically the Kingdom of Tangut, which was like a thorn in his flesh, continued to show itself recalcitrant. He organised a fourth expedition against it now and once more brought it to obedience.

At about the same time Corea, which had been a vassal of the Kin Empire, hastened to submit to the great Khan.

Then various tribes of Mongolia dared rebellion. Subotai the Valiant fell on a remainder of the Merkits and they were annihilated.

Boroul, who had saved the life of Ogotai, crushed the Tumats and died while performing this last service. Juchi, the son of Bortai, utterly reduced the Kirghiz.

Having proved his power in the East, Chingiz then turned to the West. But like a prologue to the lurid drama which was to be played there, the opening scene of his activities was centred in Kara Khitai, that great empire, adjoining his own, many of whose peoples, including the civilized Ugurs, had already acknowledged his supremacy.

Chingiz was nothing if not thorough. Before embarking on that mighty movement, which was continued by his descendants and still later resumed by the most noteworthy among them, Timur the Terrible, father of the Mongol rulers of India, he had to dispose of the nominal Gurkhan, whose suzerainty had long since been his own.

The story of Kara Khitai is, however, the story of the Mongol General, Chebé Noyan, of whom an earlier account must be given.

When Temudjin was imposing his leadership on all the tribes of Mongolia, one of these, the Yessuts, resisted him for long, but ultimately suffered a crushing defeat.

Chebé, the headman, their young and savage leader, escaped and hid in the mountains and for some time nothing more was heard of him. Then one day the Khan went

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

out hunting game. The beaters heard a big animal moving in the undergrowth.

"A leopard," they said, "or a wolf."

But a fiercer beast than any they sought suddenly sprang into sight—a man whose aspect was scarcely human. His stature was immense. The matted hair hung into his glaring and bloodshot eyes, and his garment of ragged felt left his brawny chest uncovered. They captured him at last, recognized Chebé and brought him to Temudjin. The Noyan, reduced to desperate straits by long wandering in the taiga, would have been slain, but for the intervention of Boorchu, one of the Khan's earliest and best friends, he who had helped to find the eight horses.

"Let me test my strength and skill against this rebel, oh ! Temudjin, for never have I seen a man of greater size."

Temudjin agreed and since both men were to be mounted for the trial, he gave Boorchu a fresh steed that had a white muzzle, while another animal was lent to Chebé.

The combatants faced each other across a large open space. Both were armed with bows and arrows. The Khan and his followers formed a circle to watch the fray. Chebé knew that if he failed his life would be forfeit. If he won he could expect no mercy.

Boorchu shot his shaft and missed. The Noyan looked wildly round. A menacing murmur rose from the crowded ranks. He fitted an arrow to his bow, took aim and let it fly. The white muzzled horse, pierced to the heart, fell to the ground. Next instant, Chebé lying low on his steed's neck, forced the animal at a gallop through the ring and was gone.

Temudjin restrained his men.

"It was boldly done," he said. "A fearless heart makes a good friend."

Some years later, when the Khan had established his

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

power, Chebé Noyan came in from further wanderings and offered his allegiance.

"I am he who on a time killed your white muzzled horse," he said truculently.

"There are other horses in the world," said Temudjin.

"I am also he who spared your friend Boorchu," said Chebé.

"For that I thank you," answered Temudjin, "and will make you commander of ten men. When you have proved your worth, you may rise to the command of many tens."

"I will be your man and serve you faithfully," said Chebé. "And I shall remember your words, that there are other horses in the world."

This then was the man who invaded China with Chingiz and was afterwards dispatched by Chingiz against Kara Khitai.

At the time that Bai-buga, the last Khan of the Naimans, was defeated and killed, the official suzerain of the western empire was the Gurkhan Chiluku, who was a grandson of the famous Yelui Tashi, conqueror of Kashgar, Yarkend, Khotan and Turkestan.

The weakness of Chiluku had caused the defection of all his great vassals, not only the Idikut of the Ugurs, but also the Khan of Transoxiana and the Shah of Kwareasm. Bai-buga's son Kushluk fled for refuge to the Gurkhan, and was received with honour. He married Chiluku's daughter and collected his own scattered forces.

Kushluk was a man of strong and unscrupulous character, and soon his renown spread far and wide. Crowds flocked to his standard and his position as a leader being assured, he invited the co-operation of Shah Mahommed, ruling in Kwareasm, to overthrow his father-in-law. It is probable

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

that he had had an eye on Chiluku's dominion from much earlier days, when he had made an alliance with his brother Togrul, Wang Khan of the Keraites. The Shah was supported by Osman, Khan of Transoxiana, against whom Chiluku now sent a punitive expedition. Kushluk seized this opportunity to rob the state treasury of Kara Khitai and openly to declare war.

The Gurkhan recalled his army from Samarcand and used it with success against his perfidious son-in-law.

Shah Mahommed and Osman then crossed the western boundary together and inflicted a reverse on the Kara Khitan forces, which attempted to stop them. As the Gurkhan's second army retreated, they plundered their own country and slaughtered all who resisted, so that civil war was the outcome.

Chiluku, as a last resort, demanded the immediate restoration of all plunder and particularly of the state treasures. The ravaging troops had no intention of giving up their spoils and Kushluk's answer was to seize the person of the Gurkhan and frankly to usurp his authority.

Chiluku died two years later and Kushluk remained master of Kara Khitai.

The idea of the existence of Prester John still persisted in Central Asia. First it had fixed on Yelui Ta-shi as the outstanding personality of his time. Then it had been fastened on Wang Khan of the Keraites. These two, being dead, were now precluded from an honour which argued immortality, and faith, with the strangest disregard for reason, transferred itself to Kushluk.¹

It was immaterial that, though in his youth he had been a Christian, he had since become a Buddhist on the solicitation of his wife.

¹ "In the statement of Rubruquis, the title of King John is assigned to the Naiman prince, Kushluk" Yule.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Yelui Ta-shi had never confessed the Nestorian creed and his only claim to notice had been his power as a conqueror.

Prester John, in all credulous minds, was the reigning potentate of the East, mighty and invincible, and when he was established and recognized his divine purpose would be revealed.

Otherwise interpreted, the notion of the Nestorian missionaries undoubtedly was, that any great conqueror might be proclaimed as Prester John and that his conversion might follow, with the result that their creed would be widely promulgated.

Why the myth was never attached to Chingiz, the greatest figure of his time and of all ages, remains a mystery. His tolerance of all religions was extraordinary. His influence was remarkable. He must have been perpetually in touch with promoters of the faith. If anyone deserved the honour, it was surely a man whose own name and title will never die.

Yet the identification, which so grotesquely was accorded to one incongruous person after another, never for a moment rested on him.

The only explanation of this fact must be that Chingiz, whose mind was mightier than all others, knew himself. For all his faith in his own destiny, for all his belief in divine ancestry and divine support, he was a modest man. He was aware of his own limitations and he trusted his own humanity. He was firmly convinced that Heaven was on his side and might have claimed to be the instrument of God, as his forbear Attila had called himself a scourge in the hand of the Almighty.

But like every genius, Chingiz was a lonely soul, and as such he never ceased to search for his equal. No ordinary man could be this. The only person whom he might call

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

a kindred spirit was Prester John. The disillusionment of Wang Khan turned his attention elsewhere. And though the blow had blighted his hopes and this attention was consequently modified thereafter by suspicion, he pursued the idea with an intensity that forced itself on his world.

Chingiz could not be called Prester John, for by the showing of the Mighty One himself, Prester John was a figure separate from Chingiz.

In sending an expedition against Kushluk, the son of his ancient enemy, Chingiz must have been prompted by mixed feelings. Aware of the rumours attached to the name of the Strong Man, he saw the possibility of at last finding Prester John and desired to prove the point. If the usurper was more than mortal, Chingiz would welcome the first defeat he had sustained because it must open the way to the alliance of which he dreamed. If Kushluk was a mere pretender, the sooner he was removed the better.

Chebè Noyan, the hardest headed of Mongol generals, flushed with Chinese victories, was dispatched against the Strong Man, who had made Kashgar his capital, and had aroused the antagonism of the inhabitants, by forcing them to abjure Mahommedanism. The cruelty of his persecution had gone to the length of crucifying the Imam, and the people of Kashgar were ripe for revolt.

On the advance of the Mongol army, they arose and massacred the Kara Khitan troops that were quartered in their houses. Kushluk fled with a remnant of his forces, and Chebé entered the city, carrying out the behest of his master by proclaiming religious toleration to all.

After some time the Noyan returned in triumph to Chingiz. As he approached the Khan to report what he had done, his fierce aspect was that of a questing beast who has tasted the blood of his quarry. Chebé's nature was

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

untameable—he had no ideals and knew no authority but that of the Mighty One.

“Lord, you are obeyed—Kara Khitai is all yours, and your name is glorified in Kashgar and beyond.”

“You have done well, Chebé. Where then is the Gurkhan?”

“No city would give refuge to Kushluk. I pursued him for many miles, even over the highlands of the Parmir. In the Badakshan mountains I caught him at last!”

“He submitted?”

“Lord, I did not give him the chance. Straightway I struck off his head with my own hand. The Strong Man has no further use for his title. Alone, I did this thing, lord, that men might know the power of my arm.”

The dream was once more dispelled. Prester John still eluded recognition.

“Great has been your service,” said Chingiz wearily, “but oh! Chebé, be not puffed up with pride. Through this fault fell Wang Khan and many others, and even the fame of Yelui Tashi is like to be forgotten.”

“Still I have achieved something,” said Chebé, swaggering and incapable of guessing what was in the Khan’s mind. “And I have a long memory. Many years ago, lord, I slew one of your horses, a beast with a white muzzle that you gave to Boorchu.”

“That action was long since forgiven you, Chebé,” said Chingiz smiling.

“Forgiveness demands gratitude and gratitude requires amendment, retorted Chebé. “I have wiped out my debt to you, lord. In Kashgar I collected one thousand horses, which I have brought you as a gift, and every one of them has a muzzle as white as snow and as soft as velvet!”

In after years, Chebé hunted a fugitive more important

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

than Kushluk, and that good memory of his, which no doubt recalled his own early sufferings, gave him the joy of tasting legitimate revenge against the enemy of his benefactor. This story will, however, be told in its own time, and with due regard to the principal figure.

It suffices, meanwhile, to draw attention to the fact that whereas Chingiz Khan is remembered rather as a monster of cruelty than as a conqueror of genius, this blame should be ascribed to his generals, and in particular to Chebé Noyan as the most ferocious among them. The responsibility for all successful campaigns was that of Chingiz, but, as he never limited the power of his commanders, the conduct of these campaigns and the deeds by which their glory was marred were the result of individual characteristics.

Chebé Noyan and Subotai the Valiant, those two terrible ones, gorged with plunder of a rich country, went on their way independently over part of Armenia and Georgia, till they came, beyond Tiflis, to the country of the Polovtsi.

These nomadic people, akin to the Mongols themselves, occupied the territory west of the Caspian to the Dnieper and were therefore neighbours of the more civilized Russians. They led the ravaging armies into an ambush among their northern foothills, but the vengeance they incurred by this treachery was swift and awful, and the whole population was reduced to terror-stricken flight.

Ten thousand families passed into Byzantine regions and settled in Thrace and Macedonia ; others carrying panic in their wake, fled into Russia. The sudden immigration of the wild border tribes must have filled the Russian moujiks with dismay. They were questioned : " From what do you fly, oh ! barbarians ? "

" From barbarians more powerful than ourselves. Their numbers are like the sands of the desert. Their faces are like the snouts of dogs. Many horses have they and they

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

ride like the wind. No one can withstand them and they deal death to all."

The Slavonic¹ serfs of Russia were then still established on the Dnieper, and on the lakes and rivers flowing through the Gulf of Finland to the Baltic. They had founded Kieff and Novgorod and traded in furs and honey, mingling freely with earlier Finnish settlers.

The ruling and upper classes were descended from those Vangarian Norsemen who imposed themselves in 862, and whose leader, Rurik, had crossed the sea from Sweden and founded the dynasty which endured till the 16th century. Vladimir, a cruel profligate of the reigning house, had embraced Christianity in 989 and had then hurled his idols into the Dnieper. A curious sidelight on the faith of modern Russia is afforded by the fact that this same Vladimir is now counted, in the Greek Church, as a saint equal to the apostles. Another sidelight on modern politics is the fact that Vladimir's son, Yaroslaff, made the first Russian code of laws, which were purely Teutonic. German influence therefore had an earlier date than Peter the Great.

The Vangarian conquerors showed the characteristic of Norsemen, in losing themselves among the people of the land in which they settle. They became Russ, but belonging to the industrial or military class, as distinct from the moujik, they were exempt from serfdom. They ruled by the appanage system, signifying a distribution of the land through an entire family, with the result that there were many princelings, all at variance, and civil war sapped their power.

One of these princelings was Mystislav the Gallant of Galitch, who, following the usual precedent of enlisting

¹ "Slavs were Aryans of the Indo-Germanic race, but Slavonic must be taken as covering Goths of Scandinavian origin and Avars. the core of whose empire was, in the 6th century, Hungary."—*Baddley*.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

border tribes to help private quarrels, had formed an alliance with the Polovtsi.

Internecine troubles were now forgotten in face of a more serious menace. Many princes joined together to support the fugitive Polovtsi against the Mongols, and were so blind to their own interests, that when Mongol envoys arrived proposing peace, these envoys were incontinently murdered. The Mongol generals can, therefore, hardly be blamed for continuing to carry war into the enemy's country.

At first they met with resistance. Three times their forces were defeated by the Russians, or did they only adopt their favourite tactics of feigning defeat? However this may be, the temperament of the Russ was unchangeable. History has always shown him winning, advancing, and ending nowhere.

Rivalry once more broke out between the princes. Daniel Romanovitch of Volhynia and Mystislav of Gallitch crossed the river Kalka with the Polovtsi, leaving the others behind. They met the conqueror Chebé Noyan, and the Polovtsi, like all base allies, stampeded.

The flower of the Russian army was wiped out. Three princes held a fortified palisade near the river for three days. Then they yielded and died horribly, bound hand and foot and laid upon the ground, their bodies covered with a heavy platform on which a host of Mongols sat and feasted. Mystislav and Daniel crossed the Dnieper and escaped, but the victorious Mongols pursued their way through Southern Russia, filling the country with terror, and ravaging the Crimea.

This was the final exploit of Chebé Noyan, the terrible. For his deeds, which have blackened the name Mongol, for that holocaust he made on the fringe of Europe, Chingiz Khan cannot be held responsible. Chebé ravaged and slew and returned from his hunting as he came to it, swiftly, suddenly, like a wild beast in the night time.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

The principle Mongol invasion of Europe occurred after the death of Chingiz, when his son Ogotai ruled in his stead, and his grandson Batu continued the work of Juchi in founding and leading the Golden Horde.¹

Batu demanded a tithe of the Russian princes' treasures, and his envoy, curiously enough according to the chornicles, was an eerie witch woman with two attendants. His demand was refused with scorn and he thereupon enforced it with an army of 100,000 men, led by the veteran Subotai the Valiant. East and West now met in conflict disastrous to the latter. The progress of Russia was retarded for centuries and from that day she has never shaken off the Oriental influence imposed on her. From the eastern borders, the Horde bore down on the central provinces, dealing death and destruction. Russians and Polovtsi, banded in general calamity, fled into Hungary, which was afterwards invaded by one portion of the Horde, while another portion swept on through Poland, till they met the shock of resistance offered by Henry II of Silesia and his Teutonic Knights. The Christian Cross went down before the Tuk banner of the Mongols, with its gleaming cross bones, the cynical symbol that ever since has stood for piracy and outrage.² Duke

¹ Described by Marco Polo as kings of the Ponent, the dynasty founded by Batu, 1st Khan of the Golden Horde, ruled over the territory of Kipchak in the Caucasus, which extended in length from the Sea of Istanbul to the River Irtish and in breadth from Bolgar to the Dzungarian Gate. The name of the Golden Horde was taken in imitation of the Niu-chi (or Juchi) tribe who founded the dynasty of the Golden Khans in China.

² This standard, with its Chinese name, actually resembled the original Imperial one, adorned with the nine yak tails. Originally the Tuk was a long pole on which hung the fat tail of a Tibetan cow. This was the special standard of the Chinese emperors, and when they conferred royal dignity on Turkish or Tartar vassals, they gave them, as investiture, the same kind of banners. Hence the name of Tuk, adopted by Turks and Tartars, who, in default of cows' tails, used horses' or yaks' tails, in this case surmounted with two bones crossed, in blasphemous allusion to the sign by which the Christians conquered.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Henry and many another Court and Palatine died on that dreadful day and from every vanquished corpse an ear was cut and sent in nine sackfuls to the Grand Khan.

Southern Hungary and the greater part of the Balkans were ravaged by the Horde. Subotai went on to within two German miles of Vienna, and thence, on the sudden news of Ogotai's death in the homeland, he conducted a masterly retreat, which finally confirmed his military genius.

As before, the Mongols came, conquered, slew and went. And the calamity and swiftness of their visitation are the points by which it is remembered, while, with a curious perversion, the terror that has lasted through the ages confuses the activities of the Horde with the personality of Chingiz.

By the strangest paradox, Chingiz, who destroyed the only two great civilizations of the middle ages, that of China temporarily and that of the Kwaresmian Empire for ever, was by this means the unconscious agent of carrying, through the intermediary of barbarians, culture to the unenlightened West.

With the Golden Horde went the idea of printing and the knowledge of the compass from China and the arts of Persia from the ruined empire of Kwaresm, advantages long lost, advantages only rescued from oblivion by the Crusaders, but advantages the origin of which remains unquestionable.

The Mongol invasion of Europe has been called the greatest disaster that ever befell mankind.

Without it, the Renaissance would not have happened when it did. In thus benefiting the West, Chingiz Khan devastated the East. Yet it is there that he is still venerated as a demi-god and here that he is condemned as a savage.

In the old days, the barbarians of the West must have been, in spite of their terror, more discriminating. We hear

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

that the Mongols were in regular treaty with the piratical Venetians and adventurers of many nationalities flocked to the Tuk standard.

Among them an English Templar is mentioned as having carried a letter from Batu Khan to Bela, King of Hungary, and the same man who was obviously an interpreter and spoke Russian, German, Turkish and Persian, was among the eight and only prisoners taken by the Germans, during a Mongol reconnaissance on Vienna.¹

Only the greatness of Chingiz Khan, continued in his descendants, could have made such an extraordinary appeal to the enterprise of the daring.

¹ Cahun.

CHAPTER XIV

ONCE on a time, a Turkish slave called Nush Tegin was presented by his Master to the Seldjuk Sultan, Melik Shah. Turks were esteemed in Persia for their comparative integrity and Nush Tegin was presently appointed cup bearer to the sovereign and prefect of Kwaresm.¹ The favour shown him was not unusual, for the Turkish captives, taken in various raids and sold in the principal slave markets, being of the Mahommedan faith, generally became the faithful bodyguards of princes or occupied honourable domestic positions. Their power within the Seldjuk dominions made it easier for Turkish nomads from the N.E. Steppes to put an end to Seldjuk rule, at the close of the 12th century.

The son of Nush Tegin proclaimed himself Kwaresmian Shah and his successor was Abou'l Fath Mahommed ben Takach, who soon established his power.

Shah Mahommed was cunning, cruel, unscrupulous and cowardly. The last characteristic was the only one which he did not inherit from his mother, the most remarkable woman of her time.

Turkan Khatoun was her name and, as the head of a military faction, she became the virtual ruler of her son's empire. The inscription on her decrees was Protectress of the World and the Faith, Turkan, Queen of Women. Lord of the World was her title and her sovereignty was unquestioned. But of her strange story more hereafter.

Shah Mahommed planned revolt against his weak

¹ Now Khiva. Kwaresm was the ancient name applied to the country of the Lower Oxus, south and south-west of Lake Khorezm or Aral.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

suzerain, Chiluku, Gurkhan of Kara Khitai, and was aided and abetted by Osman Khan of Transoxiana. Osman became the Shah's vassal, but did not gain much by this defection, for the agent, whom he sent to pay tribute, was murdered by Mahommed's order. Then Chiluku was defeated by the combined forces, and died miserably after the usurpation of his power by Kushluk. This victory caused great joy in the Kwaresmian empire, and Osman's capital, Samarkand, was overshadowed by the pride of Mahommed. Osman, in a jealous passion, commanded the murder of all Kwaresmians in the city and drew swift vengeance on his head. The Shah attacked and took Samarcand, where, for three days and nights, his army slew and plundered. The Khan of Transoxiana came out dressed in a grave-shroud, with a naked sword hanging from a cord around his neck and fell on his knees before Mahommed to beg for mercy. As history so often shows, however, a woman was his undoing. He had married Mahommed's daughter, but had shown preference for an earlier wife. At the critical moment, the offended lady rushed in and demanded the immediate death of her husband and her rival. The Shah gave satisfaction to his daughter by killing not only Osman and his favourite but the whole of the Khan's family.

Transoxiana was now added to Mahommed's dominions and he made Samarkand his own capital, after banishing thence all the wisest men of that city who might upset his authority.

His Empire subsequently extended from Herat to the sacred river of India, the Ganges. It comprised the Kingdom of Gur, with the ancient cities of Herat and Balkh, and it was an Empire won through rapacity and double dealing and based on wholesale murder. A single naïve account, from the old records, suffices to show his methods :

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

"The Sultan ordered Belka Khan, Lord of Otrar, to betake himself to Nessa and stay there. He had thought of sending him to Nessa rather than to any other country, *because this locality was extremely unhealthy, on account of its hot climate.*"

Belka Khan, however, survived for over a year and was much beloved.

The Sultan, therefore, "dispatched some one to fell the top of that trunk, which caused all eyes to weep tears of blood."¹

At last Mahommed found himself opposed by the Khalif, Nassir, in Baghdad. The temporal power of the Khalif had shrunk, but his name was still mentioned in public prayers throughout Isham. The blood-stained Shah demanded from this authority the title of Sultan, a representative in Baghdad as governor and his own name mentioned in prayer, and on the Khalif's refusal he supported his claims by cunningly forcing a sanction from the Ulema or principal body of Mahommedan theologians. He planned to replace Nassir in the Khalifate with one of his own relations and to this end assembled an army, annexed Irak and proceeded to march on Baghdad. His main forces had reached the mountains of Heulvan when a snowstorm began and continued for twenty days. Tents were buried, men and horses died in great numbers and finally bands of ravaging mountaineers fell on the remnants of the disorganised army and cut it to pieces.

The faithful, who still supported the power of the reigning Khalif, saw in this disaster the avenging hand of God. The Khalif, himself, however, had not been content to wait on the decree of Providence.

¹ "Histoire du Sultan Djelal Ed-Din," by Mahommed En Nesawi.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Tracing his descent from Abbas, the Uncle of the Prophet, he had long been opposed by the sect called the Fatimids or Shiites, who sanctified the person and progeny of the Prophet's daughter Fatima and her husband Ali. The Abbasids were continually threatened by the Fatimids, and the latter believed that their day had come when Shah Mahommed attacked the Khalifate. Nassir trembled for his position and decided to invite the aid of Chingiz Khan, already famous as a conqueror throughout the East. Accordingly an envoy was dispatched and, lest he should be captured by the enemy on his long and perilous journey, his head was shaved, the message was branded on the skin and he did not start until the hair had grown again. While he waited he had time also to memorise the all-important message. He travelled for four months and reached the Mongol headquarters. There, when he had delivered his verbatim report, his head was shaved again and the writing, besides proving his credentials, set forth an invitation to Chingiz to invade and destroy the Kwaresmian Empire.

It is reasonable to suppose that the great Khan hesitated. He had already sent an embassy of friendship to Shah Mahommed with rich gifts. Carrying ingots of silver, boxes of musk and robes of pure white camel hair, the envoys had delivered these presents to Mahommed at Bokhara, with the following message :

"The Great Khan salutes you and says : 'I know your power and the great extent of your Empire. . . . I have the greatest wish to live in peace with you ; I look on you as my most cherished son. You are aware that I have subdued China and brought all Turk nations north of it to obedience. You know that my country is swarming with warriors, that it is a mine of wealth and that I have no need to covet lands of other sovereigns. You and I have an equal interest in favouring commerce between our subjects.'"

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

In fact, if Chingiz could gain his end, which was the vassalage of Shah Mahommed by peaceful persuasion, he was, like every strong ruler, loth to resort to arms. In calling Mahommed his son, he actually designated the degree of submission he expected, for this rule of fictitious relationship in varying order prevailed between the princes of Asia.

But Mahommed judged all men by himself. He was disheartened by the failure of his army in the Heulvan mountains and alarmed by the sense of menace on the Mongolian frontier. To cover his own tracks, however, he pretended ignorance.

"Who is this Chingiz Khan that calls me his son?" he inquired of Mahmoud el Kwarezmi, the chief envoy. "Has he indeed conquered China?"

"There can be no doubt of that," was the reply.

The Shah frowned. "Has he still a great army?"

El Kwarezmi trembled at the sign of irritation and answered hastily, "Great enough, but not to be compared with your own, oh! Shah!"

"That is well," said Mahommed, "and I shall send rich presents in return for those I have received and in token of good feeling. Meanwhile," and he took from his arm a bracelet set with a magnificent pearl, which he handed to the envoy, "take this for yourself and remember to serve him who knows how to reward intelligence."

El Kwarezmi did not fail to carry out an injunction he had already received from another quarter. Chingiz Khan was more generous to his spies than Shah Mahommed.

So peace reigned for a time on the surface, while plot and counter plot went forward underneath.

Near the mouth of a tributary of the river Sir Daria, better known as the Jaxartes, lay the frontier town of Otrar, some three hundred miles north-east of Bokhara.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

It was a walled city of flat roofed houses, above which graceful minarets towered and the domes of mosques seemed to float like bubbles, all overlooking the fertile river valley. Southwards extended leagues of sandy desert and, on the north stretched a range of mighty snow-capped mountains. The town, by reason of its isolation, as an outpost of Empire, had cause to fear the Mongol caravans, which came that way for purposes of commerce. Passage could not be denied to traders while peace prevailed, but the governor and inhabitants of Otrar knew what history has always proved that the merchant is the pioneer of conquest.

One summer day, the approach of a great caravan from the north was announced from the city wall. The people crowded to the gates to watch its advance. Across an expanse of Steppes, by way of lakes shimmering as in mirage, it had crossed the snowy range of the Kara tau and now debouched on the plain of Northern Turkestan.¹ The bells of the caravan could be heard from a great distance. Then, as it came slowly nearer, first to be distinguished were some sturdy black dogs running in front, followed close by a tall man clothed in sheepskin, slouching at the head of a string of small strong Mongol ponies, each carrying a rider. Then came a file of laden camels, followed by many covered bullock carts carrying the merchandise, and finally more camels with a rearguard of mounted men.

Slowly, steadily, like a dark and sluggish stream, they flowed down into the valley where poplar trees pointed to the blue sky, and reeds edged the river's bank. What experiences, what adventures must have been theirs in their journey of many months! To that valley of peaceful aspect and hidden agitation, they came from terrible deserts,

¹ The name Turkestan means the stopping place or "stan" of the Turks, whose caravans passed perpetually between the empires of China on one side and Rome on the other.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

from fearful visions of naked truth, which left them strong and serene. Beside the river they made their camp, a mighty one extending over a great area, for besides the bodyguard, the animals and the followers, five hundred Mongol merchants formed the nucleus of the caravan.

Men of mark were they, since none but the wisest and bravest could dare that great adventure.

Unimaginable was the wealth they carried in wool, in jade, in jewels and in precious metals.

But was commerce their only object? This was the vital question which the trembling inhabitants of Otrar whispered to one another.

From her roof, Ai-Yaruk, the courtesan, looked that evening on the crowded street. Bright Moon was her name and it fitted the beauty of her face and form. To her, Inaldjuk the governor had promised with his protection a bracelet of pure white jade, if she should discover the intentions of the Mongol merchants. Having disposed their tents, some of them, surrounded by a curious and noisy rabble, were riding into the city. The pungent scents of camel and horseflesh and sheepskin mingled with the odours of oil and fruit and grain and flowers in the narrow streets.

A goat and her kid ran along the gutter. A cock crowed from a wall. Even a black pig, one of the unclean scavengers from beyond the wall, had forced a way through the gate. In a raised booth, under a roof of thatch, sat two dealers in corn, busily engaged with their scales. In another shop, a grey-beard reclined smoking among his carpets.

In a library, a group of the learned squatted, discussing profoundly the store of bookish wisdom hoarded above their heads like honey in a honeycomb. The clamorous crowd was of many nationalities: Turkomen, Arabs, Jews, Abyssinian slaves, Indians, Persians and Chinese.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

For this town of Otrar was the threshold to one of the marts of the world.

Ai-Yaruk, the Bright Moon, leaned on the coppice of her roof, while yet the sky was light. She was a Turki hill woman, but somewhere in her ancestry a Greek may have figured. Her skin was pale, her eyes dark as unfathomable pools. Her grace was that of a white rose, from which perfume is distilled. With her henna stained fingers she drew across her face a veil of indigo gauze, striped with silver, and watched.

They came, the marvellous merchants on their stately camels, caparisoned in scarlet and purple and moving their snake-like heads in time to their padding footsteps. They came, sitting high on their saddles, wanderers from afar, astounding adventurers, with laughter on their lips and strange songs in their mouths.

And seeing them, the Bright Moon felt in her heart, dulled with empty pleasures, the call of high and desolate places, knew in her soul, satiated with sweetness, the appeal of the salt of the desert. Then with a cry that rose from some inner chamber of her being, a cry of longing and of welcome, she leaned yet a little further forward, and threw from a tray at her side a flame-coloured blossom. It was caught by one of the last of the riders, more meanly mounted than his fellows, on a Mongol pony. He looked up, laughing. His face was young and smooth as her own, but dark and strong like a storm.

He set the flower in his leather cap, sprung from his horse and left the cavalcade. Next moment, he was knocking at her door. No dalliance here, no marking of her house, that he might return later. The desert does not brook delay, and he knew no law or custom but that of the desert.

She had time to rule her troubled instinct, time to realise the wisdom of encouraging his speech for her own ends.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

A bracelet of precious jade was at stake. She stretched her arms and imagining how one of them might be encircled.

She received him with delicate wonder, flowery compliment, frank acknowledgment of her profession, lavish hospitality. She set before him wine and baked meats. She led him to recline on a carpet of silk and cushions of down. Her handmaiden laved his feet and hands in perfumed water and anointed his head with oil.

All this luxury was new and delightful to the young merchant, who had never been so far south before and had known no women except the honest ones of his homeland. Fantastic tales of love had he heard from men older and wiser than himself. Maidens like wilted flowers had been brought captive in the train of the conqueror, from far Cathay. But this woman was akin to his own people, bold as they and a thousand times fairer, frank as they yet emanating an atmosphere of mystery. The reality of love in a strange country exceeded his wildest expectations.

The Bright Moon took her lute and, while night descended swiftly on the city and her counterpart climbed up the star-spangled sky, she sang to him in her own dialect verses that were a free adaptation from the Persian :

“Woe to the heart by cheering love unlit,
By wine uncomforted, unmov’d by wit,
For when the Finger beckons at the Door,
We must arise, leave all and follow It.

Alas, Beloved, when the morning light
Drowns starry passion in the bowl of night,
What was it ever but a passing dream,
A breaking bubble, a brief appetite !”

“There is regret in your song, oh ! woman,” said
226

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

the young merchant. "I understand it not. In my country we sing of war or of wine or of love, but when we are sad we do not sing at all."

"War is sad," said the Bright Moon, "for death is the end of all. And the lees of wine are bitter. And the end of love is like ashes in the mouth."

"Nay," said the young merchant, "war is glorious while a man lives. And your wine is sweet; fill up my cup. And you are fair, oh! woman! Your body is like a fine sword in a sheath of silver. Your hands are like snow stained with the setting sun. Your feet are winged and as they move they set my heart aflame. And nothing can quench that fire but the shadow of your eyes, which are like twin lakes in the mountains!"

"Now do I see," she answered smiling, "that you are of a fiercer breed than any man I have known. Impatient and untameable one! As you love me, tell me what has brought you here?"

"Desire!"

"Nay, how should you know aught of female charms having never beheld them? Are you not a babe in love? Do you not await instruction?"

"Let me learn of you!"

"Tarry a little. I bestow not my wisdom on any man. Was it merely the spirit of adventure that brought you southward or was there a deeper motive? Is your caravan under orders of a high authority or is it a private enterprise?"

"Assuredly you might guess from its importance that it is engaged in weighty business."

"Ah! beloved, then you were well chosen to come south. It is a matter of state?"

"That is no concern of women. Did you call me beloved?"

"Lord of my life, drink again. I promise you endless

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

delight. Is it true that your Khan already has a great territory ? ”

“ He rules over one half the world and looks to the other half.”

“ Before embarking on fresh conquest, will he not need to spy out the land ? ”

“ If so, he will be well served. There is none like him on earth. He is Chingiz, very mighty. For him, I would go into any trap, take any risk.” The young merchant hiccoughed and waved his drinking cup above his head.

“ You think yourself safe in this little city, behind walls. I tell you, Chingiz could level those walls and drive out your warriors like sheep to the slaughter, as he has done aforetime. Your defences would be like fuel to the flame of his coming, and he who knows all will be well aware of this ! ”

“ Alas ! ” sighed the Bright Moon, “ what would become of me in such a day of wrath ? ”

“ Here is a strong arm to enfold you. What do we care for to-morrow ? ”

When morning lifted the veil of night, she dismissed him and directly he was out of sight, she sped to the house of the governor with her report.

The fevered fancy of Inaldjuk saw in this, proof that the Mongol merchants were spies dispatched by Chingiz. Their purpose must be frustrated, but considering the number of the caravan, there was risk in immediate action. The Bright Moon asked for her promised reward.

“ Oh ! pearl of surpassing lustre,” said the harassed governor, “ your subtlety is only to be equalled by your greed. Rest assured that when this danger is removed, you shall have your bracelet of white jade.”

The interview ended in ill-humour on both sides. In the eyes of the Bright Moon, Inaldjuk appeared old, incompetent

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

and parsimonious. The governor had no leisure to entertain or be entertained.

Early that evening, the young merchant came again to the house of the courtesan. By this time she knew what was about to happen. She met him at her door.

"I cannot receive you to-night, I go to a feast in the city."

"You go to no feast to which I am not bidden. You are mine !"

"In exchange for the handful of gold you gave me last night ? she shrilled. "I belong to no man !"

He caught her up in his arms, wound her veil tightly round her mouth and carrying her to the roof, laid her on a divan.

"Not gold but strength proves my mastery," he said. "Yet you shall smile on me again, for I bring you a gift."

From his pouch he took an object in a wrapping of silk and threw it in her lap.

Impressed by his violence and impelled by curiosity, she opened it and discovered a bracelet of milk-white jade. Its beauty lay in its complete simplicity, its perfect purity. It was like a circlet of solid snow, ice-cold to the touch, smooth, without flaw or blemish. She slipped it on to her wrist and her eyes shone.

"It is of the best 'mutton fat' and it is worth much gold," said the young merchant.

She drew him down on to the divan.

"Now do I know that you love me, beloved ! You are like no other man ; you make no empty promises. Truly I am yours and in denial I did but test you. Stay with me, oh ! my lord, and venture not into the city again for many days."

So he stayed and, in answer to her questioning, he told her of his homeland. He told her of the tremendous plateaux stretching to dim horizons. He told her of immense

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

mountain ranges towering to the sky and of the great wind-swept pass through which the caravan had come. He told her of terrible deserts, with sand dunes like solid waves of the ocean, studded with tamarisk bushes and whitened with the salt of inland seas.

And the eyes of the Bright Moon grew wistful as she listened and she knew again the desire for high and desolate places.

"In this little city we cannot abide," said the young merchant. "But when we have stayed here a while, I will set you on a camel, oh ! woman, even on a swift trotting camel. And you shall wear a mantle of lamb's wool and a robe of crimson and the black braids of your hair shall be twisted with pearls."

As he spoke, the distant clamour of the street below seemed to increase. There were sounds of a turbulent throng and running footsteps.

"From the midst of this turmoil, love must fly like a bird," said the young merchant. "Tell me, oh ! woman, will you be content to leave all and follow me ?"

"Ay, lord. But not yet. Stay here in safety with me for a time. The noise we hear means nothing, but the city is disturbed by the presence of many strangers."

"There is no need to fear those who come in peace."

"Yet the intention of the wolf may be guessed if his disguise of sheep's clothing is penetrated."

The young merchant laughed. "We be no wolves, but honest traders, commerce our only object."

"Did you not say that Chingiz sent you to spy out the land ?"

"Never ! The Great Khan encourages trade and, in so far as we deal well, we obey his commands. Let no thought of treachery come near you. Chingiz seeks alliance with the Shah."

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

The Bright Moon shivered. "Ah ! well," she said lightly, "this is no concern of mine. Only I pray you, lie close with me, lord, till idle suspicions pass."

The shouting grew louder and mingled with the clash of arms.

"What does this mean ?" said the young merchant. "Can there be fighting in the street ?"

She wound her arms round him. "It is some tavern brawl, lord. It is beneath your notice."

Now a man's voice yelled the battle cry of Islam, appealing to Allah.

"Something serious is surely amiss," said the young merchant, trying to free himself.

Still she detained him and caressingly put her little hands over his ears, so that he could not hear the rising groans and shrieks. But presently, when these were muffled by distance, he asserted his will, rose and went to the edge of the roof to look down.

"A string of camels is passing. They have the aspect of our beasts, but they are riderless and led by slaves."

"There are rich merchants among our own people, lord."

"Strange ! Hark to those cries from the direction of the fortress !"

"It is the place of execution, lord ; no doubt a band of thieves are expiating their crimes in torment."

"That is well," he said reassured. "This city air breeds peculiar fears and fancies. But I am mad to think any harm could come to our company here. We have been well received. The governor himself was impressed by our wealth and flattered our enterprise."

"Ay," she muttered. "Inaldjuk hath an eye for wealth."

Full of his own thoughts, he paid no attention to her words, but yielded himself once more to love.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Some hours after midnight there came a heavy knocking at her street door. The young merchant slept. The Bright Moon arose and listened trembling.

The knocking continued and a hoarse voice shouted, "Open, in the name of Inaldjuk."

She crept down the stair. "Who are you that come in this hour to a house of women?"

"Open! You have a man within!"

"By Allah! there are none here but defenceless females. Ai-Yaruk, known in the city, speaks!"

"Oh, courtesan, your mouth is full of lies and all uncleanness. You have traffic with the enemy stranger, whose brothers have already tasted death! Open, for the proof of his presence is that he has left his horse at your door!"

She tore off her bracelet of white jade and hid it in her bosom. She veiled her face and opened the door. There stood an officer of Inaldjuk's guard, carrying a naked sword and attended by two Nubians bearing flaming torches.

The Bright Moon fell at his feet. "Lord, have mercy! Lord, I have but obeyed the command of Inaldjuk which was to trap and detain the enemy stranger! Lord, he sleeps on high and will offer no resistance. Great should be my reward, lord, for that I have not permitted him to escape."

"Peace, woman! The Governor will recompense you according to his promise."

"He promised nought but a bracelet of jade," she whined, "and this service should be worth much fine gold for it has been full of danger."

The officer spurned her with his foot and mounted the stairs.

She rose presently and went and hid herself in an inner room.

After an hour she came out. All was very still. The street door was shut.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

She went up to the roof. The sky was paling in the east, and rosy clouds floated up towards the waning moon which still cast a faint light over the house tops.

In the shadow of the coping stone lay the dead body of the young merchant. She knelt beside him and with her henna tinted fingers she smoothed the hair back from his blood-stained brow.

“Alas, Beloved, when the morning light
Drowns starry passion in the bowl of night,
What was it ever but a passing dream,
A breaking bubble, a brief appetite !”

CHAPTER XV

WORD was brought to Chingiz Khan, by a camp follower who escaped, that the whole party of five hundred Mongol merchants, engaged in peaceful commerce, had been massacred at Otrar. It was said that this foul deed had been done by the orders of Shah Mahommed, but it was known that the governor Inaldjuk had been impelled thereto, partly by fear, as he suspected the merchants of being spies, partly by greed as he had seized the entire wealth of the caravan.

When Chingiz heard the news, he rose up in his council seat and lifted his clenched hands above his head. Tears filled those blue eyes which had so seldom wept. Foam gathered on his lips as he tried to speak. Finally with a dreadful shout, "Just Heaven!" he rushed from the assembly and was not seen by any man for the space of three days and nights.

He went straight to the Power he knew and trusted, the Power he believed was most present on a mountain top. When he had been uplifted by the storm as a boy, when he had given ninefold thanks for his deliverance from the Merkits as a man, when he had sought inspiration for his campaign against Cathay as a conqueror, he had ascended and remained hidden, like Moses of old, while he communed with the living God.

Now again he bared his head and put his girdle about his neck and fell prostrate.

"Oh, Life that flows most strongly in the veins of honest men, rise up from those slain bodies and fill me with

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

the power of five hundred ! As their blood cries from the earth for vengeance, so do I cry aloud to Thee oh ! God. They looked to me as a father. They called me Very Mighty and trusted my direction. Yet in Thy sight I am as a child. Thou art the Mightiest and in Thee do I put my trust. Father Eternal, what shall I do ? If Thou art with me, put a sword of fire in my soul's right hand and lend me, as a councillor, Thine angel, Death ! ”

So he remained prostrate and imploring all this time. And when he returned to his people, his aspect was so strange and still that men forbore to question him.

But they said to one another, “ Surely one half, and that the right side of the Khan's body, is illumined as though by a flame. And on his left hand is there not a shadow, as of a dark figure, that walks close beside him ? ”

Very promptly Chingiz sent three envoys to Shah Mahommed with these words :

“ You promised safe conduct to my merchants throughout your dominions. You have broken faith. If this has been against your intention, surrender at once the person of Inaldjuk, governor of Otrar, that I may award punishment where it is due. If Inaldjuk carried out your command, then make ready for war.”

The Shah's answer to this message was first to insult and afterwards to murder the envoys. His worst passions were inflamed by terror. He knew himself helpless, for Inaldjuk was the kinsman of his mother, the virtual ruler of the Kwaresmian Empire and the controller of the Kwaresmian army.

Turkan Khatoun, Queen of women, was supported by all the chieftains of the Kankali Turks,¹ to which tribe she

¹ So called from the first invention by their tribe of wheeled carts or *Kankhly*.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

belonged before she married the father of Shah Mahommed. To her military influence, she united great powers of statecraft and her orders always forestalled those of her son and were inevitably fulfilled. She employed seven secretaries and chose only men distinguished for their ability.

She also insisted on the employment as vizir, or first minister of the Empire, of her favourite slave, a low creature of mean attainments called Nassir ud din. The Shah resented the appointment but was powerless to limit the man's authority. An effort to prevent his receiving bribes resulted in his temporary overthrow, but Nassir ud din went straight to the Queen of women and was reinstated by her. As he presided in the Divan, an officer, who had been dispatched by Mahommed to bring him to justice, was ushered into his presence. But this officer had received other orders from Turkan Khatun.

Falling at the vizir's feet and trembling in every limb, he said, "I salute you in the Shah's name. His words to you are 'I have no vizir except you. Continue in your functions! No man in my Empire may destroy you or fail in respect to you!'"

Small wonder that Shah Mahommed, with his authority thus undermined, behaved in moments of stress like a mad dog. The only person who could quell him was his mother. Against her and her backing of warriors he dared not move.

The Shah heard of the death of Kushluk and met one of the Mongol armies, under the command of Juchi, who had been sent against the Merkits. Far from the homeland, Juchi knew nothing of intervening events and desired to remain at peace with Mahommed, but the Shah refused all overtures and attacked, saying he wished to earn Divine favour by exterminating infidels.

The battle was inconclusive. The Mongols retired and any advantage there was remained with Mahommed, who

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

had gained some insight on the fighting strength of his enemy.

"Never have I seen such warriors as these Mongols," he said, and it may be supposed that the vision did not afford him much comfort.

Chingiz now prepared for his greatest campaign. In the Autumn of 1218, having arranged everything, he began his march westward.

The immense Mongol army, that had traversed the Gobi Desert to Cathay, now as ever, accompanied by herds of horses and cattle, moved slowly like a dark cloud across the central Steppes.

There are two main routes from the far East to Turkestan. One is the T'ien shan peh lu, the road that lies north of the T'ien shan range, the Celestial Mountains, which stretch for fifteen hundred miles from the Pamirs to the Mongolian plateau.

The other is the T'ien shan nan lu, which is the south road, leading through the basin of the Tarim, past Kashgar and Yarkand, across the high passes of the Pamirs to Bokhara and Khiva.

From time immemorial, these two roads have been the routes by which Turkish caravans have carried their merchandise, particularly of silk and tea, from East to West. In the days of Chingiz, they therefore existed as highways, but it was he who re-established them and on this initial journey he experienced many difficulties and dangers.

The Mongols struck the great North Road after it left the Gobi Desert and followed it through the Altai Mountains, where, even in summer, masses of snow and ice accumulate. At this later season the army had to cut its way through the ice.

At last they reached the oasis of Hamil, in a valley abounding in grass and flowers. Here the main force probably

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

rested during the winter months, while the remainder pressed on over the Bogdo-ula to the oasis of Urumtsi.

They were oblivious to snow and storm, they were held together by the spirit of their leader, they were relentless as fate.

In the summer of 1219, they reached the valley of the Upper Irtysh, and there in the midst of great forests they encamped and disposed their herds.

Meanwhile the troops already on the frontier of Turkestan had had orders to invest Otrar, which was done the previous November. The main force resumed its march in the following Autumn and was joined at Bishbalik, the capital of the Uigurs, by the Idikut of that tribe. Along the western edge of the Dzungarian desert, they continued then to follow the road, by the borders of a widespread salt lake and at the foot of a rocky range.

Then they came at last to a break in the mighty mountain wall, which divides the Mongolian from the Siberian Steppes. The road took a southward turn and led them through that solitary and terrific pass, the Dzungarian Gate, which remains unchanged to this day.

Through its entire length of forty-six miles, there still blows a continuous and infernal wind which tosses the salt waters of Lake Ala Kul into waves.

In the middle of the lake is an island and on the island a small extinct volcano.

The story goes that the mysterious wind arises from a hole in a mountain or from an iron hill in a lake. Hence the pass has been called the Iron Gate, and travellers indeed suspect that the icy blasts against which they struggle must rise from the portal of some cold subterranean hell.

This is however only one of several Asiatic Iron Gates, the name having apparently been given to any strategic pass through a mountain range.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

The best known is a defile on the northern frontier of the country now called Afghanistan.

It is formed by two parallel mountains, which rise on each side and have the colour of iron. In former times there were in this defile folding gates, strengthened with iron and furnished with hanging iron bells.¹

Another important Iron Gate was that which protected the fortress of Derbend (not to be confused with the city of Derbend south of Samarcand) on the west shore of the Caspian, where an ancient wall ran along the Caucasus.²

But to this day, the Dzungarian pass is haunted, not only by the winds, but by the impression of a great army, marching forward first across the open foothills, then stretching out through the narrow defile, which shrinks to a width of six miles. Here their menace can still be felt, here the beat of horses' hoofs, and the rattle of accoutrements and arms can still be imagined.

In a barren and rugged country, scarred with deep ravines, across gravelly ground smoothed and swept by the winds, the ghosts of that Mongol army still move, hidden from sight by the dense clouds that float through the straits.

Many forms have those mists hidden, forms which yet cannot be lost. For the salt crust on sand and rock and the great waves of solid earth on either side the defile tell that this area was once, in prehistoric times, an inland sea, the Asiatic Mediterranean.

And among many ghosts, one by his vital energy surely overtops them all. The voice of one alone surely rises above the voice of the wind and his purpose clears the way.

¹ Bretschneider.

² In no book have I found attention drawn to the confusing ubiquity of the Iron Gates of Asia. Bretschneider concentrates on that of Afghanistan, Yule on that of the Caucasus and Carruthers on that of Dzungaria, and each speaks as though his Iron Gate were the only one of importance!

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

“Forward ! I am Chingiz ! In my right hand I carry the flaming sword of justice and at my left hand, as a councillor, rides Death. These are the gifts of the Mightiest Whose servant I am. Praise to the Mightiest Who has answered my prayer ! Forward, to the conquest of the world ! ”

Such was the greatest journey that has ever been made along the great North Road ; silk route of unimaginable adventures, one of the main arteries of the world.

And to Chingiz is due the honour of that road's continued importance. For, after he had traversed it, he organised postal services on the route for the facility of all travellers ; horses, carriages and food were supplied by the inhabitants of every district through which it ran and the safety of the road was protected by police regulations.

No savage conqueror this, who had the genius to formulate such a plan at the opening of his supreme campaign. He realised the necessities of peace and the value of inter-communication. His was an intellect that belongs to all time.

The Mongols descended from the Dzungarian Gate to the fertile valley of the Ili, and thence by easy stages advanced towards Turkestan. Shah Mahommed had heard of the enemy's concentration, but he did not stay near his frontier to meet the main army. His own force was large and in some ways superior to that of Chingiz, but it was mainly composed of Kankali Turks and these warriors were foreign to the country they were expected to protect. They lacked discipline and experience of desperate fighting, also they had no faith in their nominal sovereign as a leader.

He betrayed his weakness at once by withdrawing them south of the Oxus and scattering them among all the cities of the territory between that river and the Jaxartes, while he,

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

personally, retired still further and kept far from the field of war. He could not trust his own generals and the astrologers to whom he pinned his wavering faith had warned him that the stars were unfavourable.

Bedr-Ed din of Otrar, the son of Balka Khan, who had been murdered by the Shah, desired to take vengeance and communicated with Chingiz.

"I will see to the undoing of the dog, Mahommed," he said. "It shall be accomplished in this way. I will write a letter purporting to be from the Kankali generals to you, the great Khan. In it they will say that Turkan Khatun wearies of the base ingratitude of her son, and that therefore she has given orders that they shall submit to you. Allow this letter to be intercepted and when it falls into the Shah's hands, he will be struck with terror and weakened accordingly."

Chingiz followed this advice, but the desired effect had already been produced by Mahomed's guilty conscience.

As for the wily Bedr-Ed din, if he did not desert, in which case he probably met the fate that the Mongols awarded to all men of bad faith, he must have shared the end of the other inhabitants of Otrar.

The walls of that city were strengthened and its garrison reinforced, but after a siege of five months, the commander seeing no chance of relief, wished to surrender. The governor Inaldjuk, however, knew that he could expect no mercy from the avengers of the murdered merchants, and decided to fight to the death. Most of the troops and their leader attempted escape from the doomed town, under cover of night, but were captured by the enemy and failed to buy their lives by revealing all they knew.

The fall of Otrar followed immediately and its citizens were driven out into the bare valley, while the Mongols pillaged their homes. But in the fortress, Inaldjuk with

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

twenty thousand followers held out for two months more. They were desperately besieged, having few resources and no hope.

At last on a moonlit June night the end came. A wounded soldier rushed into an upper room of the fortress and flung his broken sword on the ground.

"All is lost, lord. We are the last men left alive. Already the gate is giving way."

Inaldjuk and his secretary, engaged in burying articles of value under the floor by the light of a single torch, heard him.

In a corner of the room crouched a female figure, whose aspect was worn and distracted, whose clothing was dishevelled and stained. Her loose hair surrounded a face that none might have recognised as the fair one of the courtesan Ai-Yaruk. With a vacant smile, she played with a pile of gold coins, allowing them to slip between her fingers with a perpetual metallic tinkle. Her reason had fled. She prized nothing now but her ill-gotten gains.

A noise of crashing timbers and yelling voices arose from below. The night was hideous with the sounds and smells of war. Inaldjuk's face was livid.

Seizing a bow and a quiver half emptied of arrows, he said, "We can still sell our lives dearly," and darted through an embrasure of the room on to a balcony that overlooked the central courtyard and the outer stairs. His two male companions followed him.

The woman did not at once move. But presently, as though pleased to find herself alone and oblivious of the ever increasing tumult below, she drew from her bosom an object wrapped in faded silk, and extracted from the covering a bracelet of white jade. Over this she crooned and laughed for several moments, before finally slipping it on to her arm. Then, gathering up two handfuls of gold coins, she rose and went quickly out on to the balcony.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

As she set foot there, one of Inaldjuk's companions fell back from the broken balustrade of brick with an arrow in his breast. The other man, already pierced through the throat, lay dead on the ground.

The courtyard was full of men and horses. The sky was ruddy from the glow of burning houses. A host of Mongols rushed the outer stairs, shouting Inaldjuk's name. He, weaponless, his quiver empty, snapped his bow across his knees and flung it far. Then, screaming defiance, with the frenzy of despair he tore brick-bats from the balustrade and hurled them at the oncoming foe.

She, whose name the Bright Moon had once suited so well, she, whose counterpart now faded in the ruddy glow of the sky, watched him and smiled.

"Never will I surrender!" moaned Inaldjuk. "Never will I be taken alive! Oh! wanton, help! Is there nothing left to throw?"

She leaned against the balustrade and laughed. The Mongols pressed ever nearer. They burst into the upper room. They sprang to seize Inaldjuk.

Suddenly the woman flung her two handfuls of gold pieces in their faces.

"The price of blood," she screamed. "I yield it to the conqueror!"

They did not pause. They held Inaldjuk fast, though he struggled like a wild beast.

"Well done," cried Ai-Yaruk. "May he die slowly! There is only one thing owing. The reward he grudged me once. The price paid for a passing dream!" And with that she tore off the bracelet of white jade and flung it after the writhing group. Then wrapping the torn folds of her clothing over her face, she laughed aloud, and leapt from the balcony into the tumultuous depth below.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Some time after, when Inaldjuk was taken, a prisoner, to the camp of Chingiz Khan before Samarcand, he who was served so well heard every detail of this capture, even to the insignificant detail of a mad woman's last words and action.

"The price of blood, said she?" he mused. "And the price of a passing dream? Well, we are not concerned with romance, but gold is another matter. What she paid in gold shall be returned in silver to him who gave it. Let the silver be molten and let it be poured into the eyes and the ears of Inaldjuk, who bought the betrayal of my merchants at Otrar."

The Mahommetan chronicler of the event says: "This cruel death was the just punishment of Inaldjuk, whose ignoble conduct and barbarous acts had earned universal reprobation."

When Chingiz had arrived at the Jaxartes with his main army, he had divided his entire troops into four great divisions.

The first, under the command of Ogotai and Jagatai, his two sons, who had gone in advance and had already taken Otrar, occupied the area near the ruins of that town.

The second, led by Juchi, his foster son, acted against the cities between Jend and the Sea of Aral.

The third, led by two generals called Suktu Buka and Alan Noyan was directed against Benakit on the river south of Jend.

Having thus disposed his troops in the rear, he himself marched southwards with the fourth division on the province of Bokhara, to prevent Shah Mahommed from reinforcing any garrison between the Jaxartes and the Oxus.

Before moving on Jend, Juchi sent an envoy to the town of Signak and demanded its surrender. The envoy was torn to pieces by the enraged inhabitants, on whom swift retribution fell, for when the city was stormed and taken

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

in seven days, not a soul was spared. The hapless envoy's son was left in command of the place, while Juchi continued along the river and, with Mongol thoroughness, sacked every town in his line of march.

Jend was deserted by its chieftain and again immediate surrender was demanded. The people wished to kill this envoy also, but he reminded them of the fate of Signak and prudent counsels prevailed. Though they refused to open their gates, they did not actively resist the invaders and when the city was taken, the Mongols contented themselves with pillage and refrained from massacre.

Meanwhile the third division, numbering only about five thousand, attacked Benakit, which was garrisoned with Kankalis. These warriors soon wearied of the siege and forfeited the lives they were unwilling to lay down for their sovereign, by the Mongol sword, directly they capitulated. Artisans of the city were spared and the young and strong were formed into labour battalions, but the weak, the unfit and the aged met swiftly the end dictated by the merciless law of Nature.

On went the army then to Khodjend, famous for the beauty of its gardens and orchards, the wealth of its commerce and the bravery of its men. Surrounding it were well irrigated crops of wheat and barley, on the higher ground to the east, and of millet and cotton below, all soon trampled by the ravaging horsemen, whose animals ate their fill of clover fodder in the fields. Poplars and willows lined the canals and cast a green shade within the city walls, where mulberry trees were cultivated for the rearing of silkworms, and vineyards yielded a rich harvest for the trade in raisins. Orchards of apricot and pomegranate glowed golden in the summer sun, melons, green and yellow, rotted on deserted barrows by the wayside, groves of pistachio trees gave promise of industry in their gardening.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

And this place so favoured in the fruits of the earth was favoured also in the valour of its defender.

Timur Melik was his name and his courage was extolled long after by the Mongols. Not trusting to the strength of mud walls, he withdrew with one thousand men to a fort on a small island in the middle of the river Jaxartes, safe from stones and arrows. The attacking army was swelled by large reinforcements of warriors and of pressed labour. Blocks of stone and of marble were brought from adjacent mountains to build a causeway from the shore to the island fortress. But Timur Melik built twelve covered barges, protected with coverings of glazed earth, soaked in vinegar, and from these armoured boats the besiegers were met by night and by day with showers of arrows. The Mongols threw stink-pots, bombs which on bursting exuded a noxious vapour, the use of which they had learned in Cathay, but the intrepid defenders under hoods of clay and felt continued like swarms of stinging mosquitoes.

The unequal contest, however, could not last. Timur's little force became depleted but there was no end to the numbers of the Mongols. At last he put his remaining men and baggage into seventy strong barges and they sped down the river at night, making no secret of their escape, but lighting their way with torches and pursued by the enemy on both banks. At Benakit, the charging flotilla snapped a chain that the Mongols had stretched across the river, but nearing Jend, Timur paused, on learning that Juchi had a large force there, with siege engines, and a bridge of boats.

The inhabitants of the country were eager to help the Kwaresmian general and brought horses, so the little force disembarked and took to the open country. Still hunted by the Mongols, they fought daily running actions, till first they lost all their baggage and finally the whole band was dispersed or dead.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

None remained of that courageous company but Timur himself, and he, unconquerable to the end, had but three arrows left in his quiver, one of which was blunted. They were enough. Only three Mongols followed hard on the heels of his jaded horse. Timur shot his worst arrow first and saw it strike the nearest pursuer in the eye. The man clapped his hands to his bloody face and his companions stopped.

"I have two other shafts left and they are sharper than that one," shouted Timur, preparing to shoot again. "If you value your eyesight, make haste to get out of range."

They obeyed him and he galloped away. Soon afterwards he joined Shah Mahommed and remained with the Shah's son, Jelal Ed din, through all his subsequent adventures.

Long was Timur Melik remembered among the Mongols. He was a man after Chingiz Khan's own heart.

CHAPTER XVI

WITH his youngest son Tului, a fierce wolf cub hungry for slaughter, Chingiz Khan invaded Bokhara.

The region through which they went was desert, dotted with plentiful oases of such amazing fertility, that this country well deserved, at that time, its title of the Garden of Asia.

Indeed, as the province of Honan in Cathay was called the Central Flowery Kingdom, since it bloomed with cultivation brought to a fine art rather than with wild profusion, the province of Bokhara might have been named, with equal justice, the Land of Fruits.

The profusion of its orchards was due to its system of irrigation, a system so perfect that it remains a wonder of the world, and overshadows by its ingenuity the almost more marvellous system that remains extant in the Chinese country of Ssu-chiuan. For whereas there, the close network of canals, that can only be compared to a diagram of veins in the human body, are drawn from the main arteries of surface rivers, here innumerable subterranean conduits or Karezs, as they are called, carry the water from far distant mountain springs over leagues and leagues of territory. The two main rivers, the Oxus and the Jaxartes, are of course utilised as well, but in the desert soil and in a land of increasing desiccation they are not sufficient. The mountain springs are therefore tapped at their sources and drawn into deep conduits, which are constructed with shafts and which gradually descend to the level of the plain, where the water reaches the surface and flows out to fertilise the arid soil.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Where water is actually the vital element, not a drop is wasted and its value is beyond price.

Without it civilisation must cease and man must die. Nothing can replace it. No philosophy, no prayers can give immunity from its urgent need. Therefore every constructive human instinct rises to fulfil the want, science, economy, art and trade. The old canals are still models for the modern engineer. The thing made for primitive necessity, in response to the prompting of the natural law, forms the foundation of every true ideal. The philosophy, the art and the commerce of Asia spring entirely from water.

But, though the initiated know this, initiation fails when overlaid with intellectuality. The tiller of the soil, nearest to truth, preserves his knowledge, recognises the natural law and keeps his ideal clear.

The citizen, enjoying the advantages of that ideal and seeing little else in his dusty streets, loses himself in an intellectual maze and only wakes to find old unbridled forces trampling at his gates.

To save their homes from pillaging hands and their Karezs from spoiling feet, the peasant inhabitants of Tarkend overruled their commanders, surrendered to Chingiz and agreed to pay ransom.

The proof that this surrender was prompted by popular feeling rather than advice is, that of the sum of 1,500 dinars claimed, no less than half was made up in women's ear-rings. Women, the conservative guardians of their race, most prone to terror yet most ready to resist an implacable foe, saved Tarkend. The invaders took the ransom and did no harm to that town.

"It shall be called Kutluk Balig, which means Lucky City," said Chingiz and he gave orders that every female in the place should be respected.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

The splendid city of Bokhara was then the centre of science, unequalled in its magnificence and culture by any town in Turkestan. It was surrounded by two walls, the outer an enormous one, built like that of Chung Tu of sun-dried bricks and pierced with many gates, each one of which was flanked with high round towers, wider at the base than at the summit. The inner wall was like a jewelled girdle, inlaid with azure, jasper, malachite and lapis lazuli and adorned with multi-coloured paintings.

Between the two walls, lay whole villages of nomadic peoples, and palaces, parks and gardens of astounding beauty, all watered by the river Sogd. Before the marble mosques stood spreading Chinara or plane trees, which were venerated by the inhabitants, who hung votive rags on the branches.

This veneration had its origin in Persia, where the *Arbre Sol*, or speaking tree of the Sun in the Alexandrian legend and the *Arbre Sec* or Dried Tree that awaited the conquest of the Holy Land by the Crusaders before it should revive, in the Christian legend, are curiously confused by Marco Polo, but may be equally identified with the utilitarian sanctity of the aged and solitary Chinara, that desiccation leaves in the desert.¹

Vineyards were enclosed in clay walls, and the vine was trained into arbours within secluded courts. Poplars lined the river bank and willows overhung the enclosures of gardens, where the mulberry flourished and completed in ubiquity with the laden apricot and pomegranate trees of the orchards.

Bokhara was as rich in fruit as Khodjend and still more famous for her apricots, which at every sweetmeat seller's stall in the bazaar were to be seen in piles, dried and stuffed with almonds.

The palaces of the rich, with their flower-painted walls

¹ Yule.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

and noble terraces, their hidden fountains playing in basins of silver and their furnishing of carpets that glowed with the colours of the ruby, the sapphire and the emerald were like a dream of the Arabian Nights. Their houses were crowded with the fairest women and also with pretty Persian boys, who had all the grace of girls and were more highly valued.

In Bokhara many races met and mingled freely, Chinese, who were highly esteemed for their taste, Indians, Arabs, Persians and Egyptians, besides the varied peoples indigenous to Turkestan and her frontiers.

But, among many creeds and all shades of political and religious opinion, none probably had more influence on the spirit of the place than the Ismailians, a Moslem sect of the Fatimid persuasion, who took their name from the seventh Imam, expected by them to return to earth at the end of the world.

Their first Khalif was called Obeidallah and he, driven out of Persia, had established himself near Tunis, won Egypt and Southern Syria and built a palace where Cairo now stands. The Fatimid empire then extended from Aleppo to Morocco and, hotly opposed to the Abbasid, inaugurated a branch of the Ismailians in the mountainous region of Northern Persia, through their agent, Hassan ben Sabah.

The tenets of this brotherhood, or secret society, besides being heretical and mystical (for on the theological side they inclined towards Pantheism and release from all positive creeds and precepts) were politically communistic. Educated with Omar Khayam, the poet, and Nizam ul Mulk, the statesman, at the Nishapur school of Movaffik, an ancient sage, Hassan had completed his studies at the House of Science in Cairo, the home of revolutionary and atheistic doctrines.

After this, he had won many disciples and had carried

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

his gospel of hatred and immorality to Aleppo, Baghdad, Ispahan, Yezd and Kerman.

Finally he had established his ideal commonwealth at the castle of Alamut, which he took by force in North-east Persia, and this, the headquarters of many similar strongholds which soon sprang up and became a terror in the land, was the home of the community known first as the Hashishshin, from their use of the preparation of hemp called Hashish, and thence, through their system of murder and terrorism, as the Assassins.

Eventually the Assassin Commonwealth was utterly destroyed by Hulagu, the grandson of Chingiz, who invaded and conquered the whole of Persia.

But before this could happen, Ismailian teachings, originally founded on Greek philosophy and perverted therefrom, must have found ready listeners in Bokhara, the centre of science, whose thought was based on the wisdom of Plato and of Aristotle.

Bokhara has been called the cradle of democracy and all national movements against despotism. But the cradle was now rocked by interested agitators and democracy had left it for the more congenial home of Cathay, a country controlled by reason unsullied at the source, a country where, through all the ages, the people have preserved their natural right to rebel against unsympathetic authority.

The great difference between the democracies of Bokhara and Cathay was, that the first had become an artificial prejudice against all restraint, an individualism born of the intellect, an impracticable and unworkable proposition of sentiment : the second was the virile will of a population so imbued with the reasonable teaching of Confucius, that they retained their judgment unspoiled and recognised in all their ideals the value of the law of Nature, a law which demands headship in government as its first need.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

The brains of Bokhara the beautiful were those of her Imams, the reciters of prayer in the mosques, her Mullahs or holy men, who had made the pilgrimage to Mecca, and her Ishans, who stood and prayed at the street corners, dressed in fine raiment, but collecting alms. These were the Scribes and Pharisees of Islam, and though they were apparently controlled by their faith and the Suffi never failed to call to worship from the minarets, the public baths were more often crowded by those who took delight in argument, than were the mosques by those who preferred meditation.

Around the heated marble chambers, multitudes congregated and were served by slaves either in the process of the bath or with subsequent refreshment of iced wine, fruit and sweetmeats, while dancing boys from Persia and conjurors from India performed for their delectation. Here met "all the saints and sages who discussed of the two worlds so learnedly," and here were all those who "did eagerly frequent Doctor and Saint, and heard great argument."

It was pleasant to talk in such surroundings. What matter that the end was less than nothing? What matter that faith waned and the state rotted to its downfall, while eternal and unanswerable questions could be discussed and ideals frail and bright as bubbles could almost be grasped? Confusion might always be confounded with the fumes of opium or hemp or the juice of the grape. So few things were certain, only that life ends, that love dies, and that therefore all men are brothers.

Meanwhile the golden age of peace and plenty belonged to Bokhara. She knew the secrets of the universe and her sages could afford to disdain as a relic of barbarism the twenty thousand Kankalis who unwillingly garrisoned her walls. Who wanted to fight? Certainly not they, for a land that was

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

not their own ! Who believed in force, when militarism demanded discipline, and philosophy was so much simpler ?

True, there had been some idle talk in the bazaar about a host of demons from the north who were carrying fire and sword through the country. Idle tales, brought from the frontier, where the maraudings of savage tribes were frequent. Even should the pillaging bands, greatly daring, venture across the great desert so far south, they would meet with a reception that must instantly quell their fierce spirit. No resistance that would inflame their ardour, and no slavish submission that would increase their arrogance, but an attitude calm and cultured that should say to them in effect :

“We recognise you as our untutored kindred and we realise that you are the victims of a despotic and petty tyranny that drives you like sheep to the slaughter and that you only await inspiration to break your bonds. Come and learn from us the theories of pure communism and we will lead you in the pleasant paths which we ourselves frequent, knowing that we should for ever betray the memory of those who have died for freedom, if we did not hold out to you the hand of good fellowship !”

And while the pacifists of Bokhara thus cogitated, Chingiz Khan arrived at her gates.

The usual demand for surrender was couched in terms that caused a flutter in the city. These younger brothers were certainly woefully untutored and their first instruction must be in patience.

Bokhara frowned on them for several days, and even sent a few flights of arrows into the midst of their closely packed ranks. But these half-hearted missiles were returned with such vigour and effect, that at once wisdom put up the cry that slaughter must cease.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Then the Kankali warriors did an ill-judged and desperate thing. With pacifists behind them and a strong enemy in front, they abandoned hope and tried to escape in the night-time. They were caught by the Mongols and cut down almost to a man, thereby proving to the government of Bokhara the futility of war.

Next morning the Ulema and notables of the city came out to offer surrender and to invite the barbarians into the courts of learning.

The city gates were opened wide and the Mongol host poured in. The civil population impelled by curiosity filled the streets. How strange the aspect of these wild, leather-clothed horsemen ! How terrific their number and with what an awful air of doom they rode, stern, silent, unsmiling, glancing neither to the right nor to the left !

In their midst came one on a white horse, led by the Imam and surrounded by Mullahs. He spoke no word in answer to their conversation. He gave no sign of his intentions. But there was that in his pose and bearing that stifled the word "brother" in the throat.

"Blessed be Allah who has brought you here," faltered the Imam. "Judge not Bokhara by any other city of Turkestan. Here is enlightenment, which, by Allah's mercy, you shall share and we will rejoice together in the day when the wolf shall lie down with the lamb."

And still never a word spoke Chingiz Khan. Then they took him to the principal mosque that all might at once join in praise of the beneficent Providence which had ordained liberty, equality and fraternity and, for their encouragement, had caused the vine, the poppy and the hemp-seed to flourish in the land.

Chingiz still on horseback gave one glance at the magnificence of its outer court.

"Is this the palace of your Shah ?" he asked abruptly.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Was ever such childish ingorance?

"Nay, it is the house of Allah," answered a Mullah, with conscious patronage. Chingiz urged his steed forward into the holy place and did not dismount till he reached the pulpit. Then he climbed the steps and looked on the great concourse of people and his own warriors who had followed him.

The wise men, agitated by such desecration, implored their flock to keep calm. Terror was beginning to grip the populace. As hundreds surged towards the mosque, hundreds already there tried to leave it, and more and more Mongol horsemen forced their way in, till the place was packed with men and animals.

And at last, with one wide sweeping gesture, Chingiz uttered his will in memorable words.

"The hay is cut," he shouted. "Let the horses be fed!"

At once the scene was pandemonium. Boxes used to hold the Koran were roughly opened and the sacred book was thrown to the gound.

"This is not permitted," bleated the Imam.

He was thrust aside and the volumes he tried to save were trampled under horses' hoofs. The boxes were taken out to the court yard and filled with grain to become mangers. Skins of wine and every sort of meat were next brought into the mosque, and while the Mongols feasted with song and laughter, saints and sages were forced to serve them as slaves.

The golden age had passed. Bokhara tasted the bitter reality of conquest.

From the mosque, Chingiz went to the place of public prayer and there summoned all the panic-stricken inhabitants to hear him. They were rounded up like cattle by the horsemen, and the wealthiest in that multitude, to the

256

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

number of 280 persons, were obliged to listen to him as he spoke from the steps.

"Who is your ruler?" demanded Chingiz. "If it be Shah Mahommed, know that you will suffer for his deeds, since he is proved a craven dog that no honest man would support."

A murmur of obsequious agreement went up. They could truthfully say that they were not loyal to this or any other sovereign.

"But if you be your own rulers," said Chingiz, "know that in justice, you shall suffer yet more keenly. For the government of this city stinks in my nostrils, and its offence rises to Heaven. Therefore have I been sent to chastise you for your sins, as a scourge in the hand of God."

"There is no God but Allah," they said in protest.

"There is no God but one and He is the Mightiest," thundered Chingiz. "I am here to bring you back to His law from which you have departed, the law of the prophets, which is the law of the sword."

Then, trembling, they besought him saying that they would pay ransom, even the great ransom he had demanded before the walls of Bokhara.

"Ay, you shall pay," said Chingiz, "but there is no need for you to deliver the wealth that you have above ground; we can find that for ourselves. Only surrender and that speedily all the treasure that you have hidden. And do not think that thereby you will escape ultimate punishment, for no ransom can now wipe out your folly, the price of which is blood and tears."

He was merciless and they could not move him. It seemed that in his right hand he carried a flaming sword, and that at his left hand, as a councillor, rode Death.

The city was forced to yield up its entire wealth. All its hoarded treasure of gold and jewels, all its rich ornaments and

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

carpets, all its looms of silk and all its fair women and boys and slaves of many nations.

The moats encircling the town were filled by forced labour with everything that could be carried there most quickly; earth and bricks and stones did not suffice, but priceless furniture and even books of great value were thrown into the gaping ditch, which thus became the grave of Bokharan culture.

The Mongol troops occupied the fortress and, when they were established there, every citizen was driven, homeless and destitute, beyond the outer wall and Bokhara the beautiful was delivered over to wholesale pillage. Any miserable inhabitant who sought to hide in that chaos was promptly dragged forth and slain.

Never in the history of the world was a city more thoroughly looted. The natural law triumphed, as it triumphs in the wild. Men knowing no other law and obeying it blindly, followed the instinct for possession, with which the instinct for destruction is so closely allied.

Meanwhile the herded people outside the gates saw their theories shattered and understood at last the signification of brute force.

Like dumb driven beasts they waited to know their own fate. It struck them most terribly with the sudden re-opening of the gates, and the ominous appearance of massed troops, drunk with greed and slaughter, who sorted them into divisions. Women and children were set apart in one group, the aged and infirm in another, strong and skilled men and artisans of all trades in others.

Over what happened on that dreadful day, decency must draw a veil. Those Mongol soldiers, who came out of Bokhara, were not to be judged by any standard of humanity. They were ravening wolves, controlled by lust, logically fulfilling the influence of war. Only Nature, in whose

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

activities birth is more apparent than death, can conceal the horrors of conflict. But they are eternally there—blood below running water, agony behind beauty, outrage behind form—the clash of spheres in the midst of the sublimity of the stars.

A fugitive from Bokhara set forth in one unconscious hexameter a terse account of the Mongol proceedings: “amandand u khandand u sokhtand u kushtand u burdand u raftand !”

“They came and they sapped, and they fired and they slew, and trussed up their loot and were gone !”¹

And a Mohammedan author at a little later date gave this account of devastation :—

“It was such as had never been heard of, whether in the lands of unbelief or of Islam and can only be likened to those which the Prophet announced as signs of the Last Day, when he said, ‘The Hour of Judgment shall not come until you have fought with the Turks, men small of eye and ruddy of countenance whose noses are flat and their faces like hide covered shields. Those shall be days of horror !’ ‘And what meanest thou by horror ?’ said the Companions. And he replied ‘*Slaughter ! Slaughter !*’ This beheld the Prophet in vision 600 years ago.”

But among the inhabitants of Bokhara, those were most fortunate who perished quickly.

And when these things had been done, the city was fired and it burned until nothing but a few crumbling ruins of brick and marble remained.

So ended Bokhara, the beautiful, centre of science and cradle of democracy !

From Bokhara, Chingiz went back to Samarcand, which Shah Mahommed had made his capital and which he had lately deserted

¹ Yule.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

This fair city, whose ancient Turkish name was Semiscant, from the word "semez," meaning fat or fertile, was then the centre of commerce.

Her inhabitants, less intellectually inclined than those of Bokhara, were chiefly traders of fabulous wealth and her importance was greater than that of the other town.

The title of "Silken Samarcand," since given to the place, was not then as appropriate to its industry as now. The mulberry trees, growing at that time in the vicinity, were not fit for the rearing of silkworms and the inhabitants, whose modern apparel is now remarkable for the richness of its texture, were then clothed entirely in white cotton.

Nevertheless the peoples' lives were easy and secure. Sleek, prosperous and self-contained, Samarcand lay only five days' distance eastward from Bokhara, in the pleasant valley of the Sogd, and ignored her approaching doom. The city was three miles in circumference and surrounded by a high wall pierced with twelve iron gates and set at intervals with strong castles. Its suburbs were watered with aqueducts, running springs, square basins and round ponds, in the midst of orchards, groves and flower gardens.

The place was garrisoned with a mighty force of 60,000 Turkomen and Kankalis and 50,000 Persians and, to lend greater weight to these numbers, twenty war elephants were attached to the army. Thus defended what had Samarcand to fear from the barbarian? She could afford to wrap herself closer in well-earned ease and attend to the business of increasing it.

Chingiz was now joined by the three other divisions of his army, who had completed their work in the north. The immense host was swelled by an incredible number of prisoners, who were marshalled in groups with gaily fluttering banners, and these were paraded with all the legions, before the walls, to impress Samarcand. The citizens were dismayed but

260

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

rose equal to the occasion. To protect their property, they made a brave sally, believing they would be supported by their warriors. But they fell into an ambush and were quickly surrounded by the Mongols, who killed them all before the eyes of the onlookers on the walls.

The warriors had held back till they saw the result of the sortie. When their own expectations were fulfilled, they deserted in a body, taking with them their leaders, their baggage and their families. They met with a friendly reception in the Mongol camp and preened themselves on their perspicacity.

"Are we not your kinsmen?" they said to the enemy. "We have no wish to resist you and prefer rather to enter the service of the great Khan."

Willingly they handed over their horses and equipment and cheerfully submitted to the command that their hair should be shaved in front, to comply with the fashion of the invading army which they were to join. They were not so pleased, however, after this, to be set apart in a place by themselves, though they were cheered by the reflection that probably in this order the Khan was showing them signal honour. As a superior breed, they could not be expected to mingle with their rougher brethren.

Meanwhile the abandoned city had submitted, and all her inhabitants, except a few who had the good fortune to break through the Mongol lines, met the same fate as those of Bokhara. While the pillage was at its height the deserters were suddenly called upon to parade. They rushed to join in the loot and were struck down by the sword to the last man.

When slaughter ceased at last, a census was made of the surviving citizens. Thirty thousand artisans were assigned by Chingiz as slaves to his sons, his wives and his officers; thirty thousand more were reserved for military works and

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

siege labour and fifty thousand were allowed to re-occupy the place under Mongol commandants on payment of a huge ransom.

Bokhara fell through her pacifists and communists.

For what reason then fell Samarcand, well armed and prosperous ?

If she had been the first to suffer, modern idealists might have pointed the finger of scorn at her industry. As it was, her importance as Shah Mahommed's capital spelt her doom. The Mongols could not afford to spare the chief city of Turkestan, and only took Bokhara first, as it lay in their way.

But there is another reason.

Had Samarcand been less engrossed in commerce and the accumulation of wealth, she might surely have imposed her own idea of values on Bokhara, her sister city, and the key to the situation.

Ruin is not wrought by the agitator and the philosopher alone, but requires also the connivance of the profiteer.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHEN Shah Mahommed left Samarcand he was the victim of despair. He took no hope from the strong fortifications of his capital, but remarked as he rode away : " The number of the Mongols is so great that they would fill the moat with their horse-whips."

But he did not then know how the moat of Bokhara would be filled.

He was like one forewarned of a visitation of locusts. The cloud no bigger than a man's hand that had risen on his horizon, when he heard of the murder of the merchants at Otrar, had swollen to monstrous proportions and darkened the face of the earth and his Empire could never be green again.

As he fled, he carried his despair with him and warned his subjects that they must look to their own safety, for he was powerless to help them. The only question that concerned him was where he should go himself, for he guessed shrewdly enough that the Mongols would soon be hot on his tracks.

Torn this way and that by the conflicting advice of his commanders and ministers, he chose finally to go to Persian Irak, which his son Rokn ed din held as an appanage.

Against this decision, but one strong voice was raised in protest, that of Jelal ed din, surnamed Mankobirti, which means the Gift of God. He was the eldest son and the only worthy member of that family, but he was the least considered. His youngest brother, Quotb ed din, known as Arslag Shah, was the favourite of Turkan Khatoun, the all powerful Queen mother, and had therefore been set over

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Jelal as heir presumptive. The second brother, Ghyats ed din, held undisputed sway over Kerman, Kich and Mekran. Rokn ed din, fair to look upon and false at heart, was generally beloved. Only Jelal ed din, hated by his grandmother, had no authority except over the frontier land of India, comprising Gur and Ghazni and Bamian, which he held in fief.

Of medium stature and melancholy dark countenance, lit with the liquid eyes of his Indian mother, he now faced the Shah and asked for a free hand.

"Give me your forces, oh ! my father, and I will drive back the Mongols and liberate the Empire. To fly surrounded with warriors is folly. Save your own person, but allow me to save the country."

"Nay," answered Mahommed, "this is Kismet, fate. The stars are unfavourable in their courses and it is useless to struggle against them."

On this, having received tidings of the fall of Bokhara and Samarcand, he made haste to escape through Khorassan, attended by his Kanalki troops.

On a night, as he slept in his tent, there came a faithful slave who roused him with fearful words.

"There is treachery in the camp, lord. The warriors plot against the life of majesty, saying they acknowledge no rule but that of the Queen mother."

Shah Mahommed rose, trembling, and sought shelter in a neighbouring village, where none guessed his rank.

When his servants went to the Imperial tent next day, they found it empty and looted and the walls were pierced by many arrows. In the camp a strange stillness reigned. The would-be murderers had fled with all the booty they could carry.

To Chingiz, spending this summer of 1220 in the valley

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

of the Sogd, to refresh and reorganise his troops, which battered on the land, word was brought of the Shah's flight. He at once dispatched Chebé Noyan, Subotai and another general, each with ten thousand men, to pursue the fleeing monarch, who must be brought to justice.

"If you find him newly encamped with a large force of fresh adherents, wait for reinforcements. If he is deserted by all but a few, attack and take him. If he runs like a hare or a fox, hunt and rest not until he is captured. And on your way spare every city which yields, but ravage those which resist."

Then began such a chase as has never been equalled. For Chebé Noyan at least, remembering how he had once been the hunted, it was sport to fire the blood. The quarry had every resource at his command and lacked nothing but will-power. Therefore he was fair game. The Mongols had nothing but their arms and their tireless horses and they delighted in their strength.

Fair before them lay the wide and splendid province of Khorassan, a hunting-ground for kings.

Its four most famous cities were Balkh, Herat, Merv and Nishapur.

Balkh was the mother of cities, great when Niniveh was young. Alexander had known her as Baktra. She boasted twelve hundred glorious mosques and two hundred public baths. Wrapped in a mantle of antiquity and splendour, she held aloof from turbulence and remained unfortified and undefended.

Chebé eyed the wealthy place greedily, but when the inhabitants sent out an offer of submission with rich presents, he remembered his orders and passed on.

Zaveh, another considerable town, was neither so wise nor so lucky. It refused to entertain the barbarian, and even so might have escaped with honour, for siege work

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

was not Chebé's purpose. But, as the Mongols retreated, the people of Zaveh mounted their walls and shouted insults and sounded drums, to indicate their triumph. It was short-lived. The Mongols, incensed to uncontrollable fury, rode back, broke into the city, and left it a smoking graveyard.

Shah Mahommed had taken refuge at Nishapur, home of philosophy and statecraft. He was past the aid of either, but as his name still stood for Empire, his people watched over him with anxious surveillance. One day he said he would go hunting with a small escort. He rode out of the city gate, glancing fearfully over his shoulder.

Nishapur never saw him again. When days passed and the city realised that it had been deserted by its sovereign, consternation reigned.

"With no head to the government, what will become of us? We are betrayed and lost. We shall share the fate of Bokhara, which departed from truth and Samarcand which grew too fat."

The Vizir, a man of resource, took over the rule of Nishapur, and, when the Mongols appeared and demanded submission, he answered bravely :

"We shall not surrender till the Shah is captured."

He dared not refuse, however, to supply the enemy with provisions, which otherwise they would have taken at the sword's point.

They came in swift riding detachments, the terrible horsemen. First one body galloped up to the gates, received what it wanted and hastened on—then another and another, till finally Chebé himself appeared, flung a warning that Nishapur should continue docile on pain of the consequences, and passed on his way.

The Shah went from Nishapur to Kazvin, where his son

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Rokn ed din had an army. Almost immediately he heard that the Mongols had entered Persian Irak and had taken by surprise and sacked the city of Rayi.¹

His troops melted like snow in the hot sun of summer. The influence of Chingiz Khan's flaming sword carried so far that the very thought of it caused panic.

The reality was so fearful as to be paralysing in effect. According to an authentic story, one Mongol entered a street where there were one hundred people. They made no attempt to defend themselves and were killed, one after the other, by the solitary horseman.¹

Again Mahommed fled to his sons in Karun. As he rode, bending low in the saddle, a band of mounted men appeared in a valley, and sent a flight of arrows in his direction. One shaft glanced off the Shah's clothing, another struck his horse in the flank. This one he plucked out and with a despairing cry he urged the beast onward.

"To the hills that they may cover us ! To any hole or ditch where we may lie hidden ! On, on, though heart fails, and limbs groan and sweat pours into the eyes ! The fortress cannot be far distant."

But there was no asylum there.

"Stay not here, lord, for the Mongols have seen you and will surely find you."

He stayed only to get a fresh horse and went on towards Baghdad, along the western road.

But those he had left at Karun knew his purpose and might betray him. Only just in time, he doubled on his tracks and turned to the north-east.

The guides, who sought favour with the enemy by pointing out the path of their quarry, were cut down by the Mongols when they proved to be deceivers.

But the net was closing in. Nowhere could the wretched

¹ Near the present Teheran.

² Ibn el Athir.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Shah rest for longer than a week. His attendants left him. He lost all his property. He ran from one place to another till he was bemused with fatigue and worn to a shadow.

"Where am I to find safety?" was his cry. "Is there no spot on earth where I can be free of Mongols?"

He no longer desired sovereignty or power. He had shrunk to the span of an insignificant human, who wanted nothing but rest.

Then his few remaining friends advised him to seek refuge on a little island in the Caspian Sea,¹ where he might surely disappear and be forgotten and so forget trouble.

To be forgotten, that was his only wish. To be a grain in the sands of the desert or a drop in the waters of oblivion. That was his sole ambition.

So they took him to a small, evil-smelling village on the southern shore of the great sea, where, in a poor fisherman's hut, he stayed for a time waiting for a boat and praying with tears to God.

"Oh! Allah in mercy hear me. Permit Thine angels to cover me with the shadow of their wings. Out of the deep I call to Thee, oh! Allah! Great is Thy compassion; Thou wilt not allow Thy servant to be lost. If Thou wilt rise and smite mine enemies, never will I depart from Thy ways again, but I will be a father to my people and such justice shall reign in my dominions that the whole earth shall praise Thee!"

He studied the Koran and prostrated himself five times a day in the local mosque, seeking to make his peace with God at any price. Surely the Power his poor mind imagined could not be deaf to supplications that gave it two alternatives—either that the suppliant should cease from further

¹ This island is now a peninsula called Gumish Tepe, Silver Hill. Ruins and silver coins are found there.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

endeavour, which was his first wish, or that he should be reinstated in power to the glorification of the Faith.

And even as Mahommed prayed, a band of Mongols appeared in the village. The Shah's friends dragged him from his knees, and hustled him half-fainting to the shore, where lay one small boat.

"I can go no further," he gasped. "Allah refuses to hear me. There is a burning fiery pain in my vitals. I am sick unto death."

They took no notice. Rude hands forced him to wade through the waves and thrust him headlong into the boat, which was at once pulled off.

The pursuing horsemen galloped to the beach, saw their prey eluding them and did not stop at the water's edge. Next moment their steeds were breasting the billows. With furious shouts, the Mongols hurled themselves into the sea after the receding boat. The loud clamour of their voices only ceased when they were drowned. No horses were now visible, except the white ones of the crested waves.

The wind moaned round the little boat, and Mahommed lying at the bottom of it, with drenched clothing, joined the plaint of the elements.

"All I asked was a few ells of earth where I might lay my bones, and even that is denied to me. Oh! misery and woe, that I who have reigned over many kingdoms should lack at the last a little patch of dry ground."

A fit of coughing shook him, and he cried aloud from the stabbing pain of the disease of pleurisy that had him in its clutches.

At last, however, the boat reached the harbourage of a small island and the Shah, reminded that this was the goal of his desire, rejoiced like a child at the thought of safety.

"Now do I know that Allah did but try me," he cried, flushed with fever and stumbling to the land. "Blessed be

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

He who has granted my prayer and brought me to a place of safety."

The boatmen revealed his identity to the villagers and Mahommed received a rough but ready welcome from the simple folk. There was no house large enough for such an illustrious guest, so they pitched a tent of sail cloth for him, and then brought blankets to form a couch and such store of food as they could muster and fresh water and even some coarse wine.

And Mahommed lay on the bed they had made, a pitiful figure with wasted hands plucking at the rug that covered him and gave audience to his subjects, who crowded to the tent.

"Rich shall be the reward of your loyalty," he cried, with nothing to give. "Bring hither a scribe, for the written word cannot be denied and I pledge my word that, one and all, you shall reap a hundredfold from what you have sowed."

Then there was a hunt for any scholar to suit the occasion, for the Shah's own secretary had long since left him to summon his sons to his side, and Mahommed himself had never learned to write. A self-educated man was found at last and parchment and ink were somehow produced.

"To you, oh ! captain of the boat, I give the command of ten thousand men in my army. You, the only man who has defeated the barbarian and caused him to perish in the sea, shall yet prove your prowess against him in the field. . . . See that it is written and I will affix my seal. . . . To Allah be the glory ! Thank Him in your prayers. . . . Oh ! sailmaker, great is your merit, for that you have raised a roof over this defenceless head ! I make you my vizir, first in all councils, and head of the State. You shall have a palace in my capital and your wealth shall be immeasurable. Here is my gage to it ! Who brought this pitcher of wine ? A woman ? Give me to drink. I

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

thirst. Her price is above rubies. She shall be freed of all cares for evermore. She shall be the owner of many vineyards and her sons shall inherit her domain. I, Shah Mahommed, enjoying the favour of Allah, promise this thing by the Koran."

So the game went on—the empty, foolish game that could mean nothing.

Yet the demeanour of the chief player was so earnest that almost those who humoured him were deceived. They did not smile. They bent the knee to receive their high-sounding titles and brevets, and gave thanks in simple words and quietly withdrew.

The poor old man, so weak, so ill, so piteous ! What was he but a child under their protection ? What were they all but children in the keeping of Allah ?

And Allah Who only asks such faith justified it most wonderfully in His own time.

In years to come, when Jelal ed din had regained a part of his father's dominions, he, the only worthy branch of that rotten stock, honoured every one of those impossible promises that bore Mahommed's seal.

Only three of the Shah's sons came to the bedside of their dying father. They were Jelal ed din, the Gift of God ; Quotb ed din, Arslag Shah, and another called Aq Shah, of whose age and personality little is known. Rokn ed din, the beautiful, and Ghiyats ed din, the weak, held aloof from that lonely island.

Mahommed's hours were numbered. His constitution, weakened by vice and luxury, had not been able to withstand the ravages of disease and want.

Now that he realised his end, a new dignity informed his whole appearance and this despite the fact that his body was so wasted that, under its thin covering, it looked small and

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

slight. The hollow, bearded cheeks, the brow bedewed with sweat, the cavernous dark eyes were those of a king whose sovereignty has been assured by a mightier power.

At the entrance of the poor tent his own few attendants and those of his sons kept back a crowd of curious peasants. The three princes stood within, leaning on their swords with eyes bent on the ground.

"Bring my sabre," said Mahommed, and when he was obeyed, he grasped the jewelled scabbard in both hands across his knees and raised himself in his bed. "He whom I gird with this shall inherit my kingdom," he whispered, exhausted with the effort.

Arslag, the heir apparent nominated by Turkan Khatoun, took a step forward.

The sunken eyes regarded him stonily.

"What have you done to save the land that it should be yours?" came the stern question.

Aq Shah spoke up for Arslag, "The people look to us still, oh! my father, to drive out the infidels."

"They will look in vain to the commanders of Kankali troops," said Mahommed. "Oh, my sons, you are many and you are strong and from the fruit of my loins I might have expected support in my necessity. But among you all, there is only one who offered it with courage and with wisdom and to his counsel I would not listen. Therefore am I brought low. Yet not so low that I cannot justify him in the end. So to him I deliver my sword and with him I leave my blessing. Come near, Jelal ed din Mankobirti!"

The young man approached and doffed his helmet and knelt beside the bed.

Then, as though inspired with new strength, Mahommed leaned towards him and girded him with the royal sabre. And when this was done he laid his hands on the head of Jelal ed din and blessed him:

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

"May Allah keep you and guide you. May Allah help you to restore the Empire and give you dominion. May Allah be with you in triumph, and in trouble may He sustain you through the shadows and the dark rushing waters."

His weak arms fell, but he raised his hands again and caressed the dark young bearded face.

"Look at me, Jelal. . . . You have your mother's eyes. I loved her well. . . . Tell her this. You have a great gift, Jelal. One mightier than I shall see it and wonder, and the plaudits of a strong army, not your own, shall ring in your ears. Yet the corruption that is in your bones shall prove your undoing and you will come to this at last, that it is best—to be forgotten."

Jelal ed din bowed his head against his father's hands and wept.

"In red wine and in the arms of women we seek to lose ourselves," whispered Mahommed. "But we can only taste oblivion through a darker draught and a colder embrace. When we have nothing more to lose—when even the desire to be remembered has passed, there is peace."

He drew his breath with difficulty. There were no other sounds but the hushed movements of his sons and the distant murmur of the sea. For a little while he seemed to sleep with closed eyes. Then he opened them wide, with an expression of fear, and looked past Jelal to the entrance of the tent.

"I come!" he said quickly. "May my shroud be the shirt of a stranger. Let fall the veil!"

And his soul passed like a shadow seeking to escape into the night.

Mahommed's wish was granted. Lacking even a length of new cotton cloth, he was robed for burial in the garment of one of his son's attendants. And history, while recording the deeds of Chingiz Khan in letters of fire, allowed the crimes of Shah Mahommed to be forgotten.

CHAPTER XVIII

TURKAN Khatoun, who lived generally at Urghendj, had retired to a castle in the mountains of Mazanderam. Here she had been joined by the harem of her son Shah Mahommed and here she kept captive all the princes and chieftains who, in the past, she had despoiled of their estates.

In her relentless fury, which did not permit her to make any complaint, she was still great, still Queen of women, Protectress of the Faith and Lord of the world, and to this greatness Chingiz Khan made generous advances.

He sent a message offering not to touch Kwaresm, which remained under her rule, and to give her Khorassan when he won it. She refused any answer, but, on hearing that Mahommed had fled westward, she made preparations for departure by first removing all impediments in the shape of prisoners. From the dungeons she summoned the Prince of Balkh and his son, the Prince of Bamian, the descendants of the last Seldjuk sultan, and many others. They were all pinioned and put to death by drowning in the Oxus.

Then she made her way, with a strong body of warriors and all the women and children, to the hill fortress of Ilak, where they would surely be safe, for, even in the event of a siege, there was ample store of food and the rainy climate would insure a supply of water.

Subotai, passing that way, in the hunt of Shah Mahommed, left a body of men to invest the fortress. The Kankali garrison laughed at the Mongols, and when an arrow carried the written taunt over their walls, "We shall

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

abide here for a long time. Are your reservoirs full?" they sent back these words in the same way, "We care not how long you abide! The clouds are our reservoirs!"

The time of the summer rains was due, but their breaking was unaccountably delayed. The wells soon ran dry and day after day anxious eyes scanned the western horizon. The children sickened, the animals died, a foul stench pervaded the place. All around were nothing but bare brown hills under the brazen canopy of the sky, and the only clouds were those of choking dust raised by the movements of the horsemen.

It was suggested to Turkan Khatoun that she should send a secret messenger to ask help of her grandson, Jelal ed din, known to be not far away with numerous followers.

But she hated this young man for his lofty purposes and his honesty, with an undying hatred, and answered in a rage that any fate, even captivity, would be more welcome to her than salvation at his hand.

At last the day came when, sitting in state, with dry lips she commanded a slave to bring her a cup of water.

She could not think, she could not act, while her throat was scorched and her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth. The servant disappeared. The commander of the troops came to her. His face was black with dirt and his red-rimmed eyes started from the sockets.

"There is no water," he said hoarsely.

"Then give me blood," she said, glaring at him.

"It is salt," he answered. "I have tasted it. On the wall we have drunk terribly. We are mad. It is better to die quickly. We must surrender."

She rose up with a shriek and rent her garments and bit her arm and sucked the wound

He left her in this frenzy and went out and gave up the fortress.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

When the Mongols took possession, the night brought a sudden strong wind from the south-west. The sky was soon covered with clouds and, just too late, there came a great rainfall.

All the Kankalis and nearly every male child in the harem were killed. But Turkan Khatoun, one of her small grandsons, and the women were taken to the camp of Chingiz Khan. Here the greater number of the females were treated as spoils of war and handed over to the sons and advisers of Chingiz, to use as they pleased. Only the Queen mother did not share this treatment.

For her a more bitter fate was reserved. There was only one creature on earth whom she really loved with all the force of her passionate nature, the young grandson she had contrived to save from death.

She never allowed this child to leave her side and attended to him personally. Eventually she was removed a prisoner to the Mongol homeland, and she was one day dressing the boy, when one of her captors came to her and announced that the little prince must be taken away to Chingiz. He was dragged from her arms and she never saw him again, nor does history relate how she passed the remaining eight years of a miserable existence.

When the three sons of Shah Mahommed left their father's island grave for Kwaresm, the people flocked around them, but the Kankali warriors only wished to support the inheritance of their young kinsman Arslag, and all resented the claim of Jelal ed din.

While the brothers were at Urgendj, which was now the Kwaresmian capital, there came to Jelal secretly the Khodjend commandant, Timur Melik, who had escaped from the Mongols, with the warning of a plot against his new master's life.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Accompanied then by this trusty general and three hundred men, Jelal straightway fled across the desert to Nessa.

Meanwhile the main army of Chingiz had been thoroughly reorganised after the capture of Samarcand, during the summer sojourn in the valley of the Sogd. It was now ready for renewed action and, in the autumn of 1221, he sent a large force under his sons Ogotai, Jagatai, and Juchi against the plotters at Urgendj.

Arslag Shah and Aq Shah attempted to follow their brother to Nessa, but were caught by the cordon of Mongols that had formed on the southern rim of the desert to cut off their retreat. After a bloody action, in which says the Persian poet, "the earth was clothed in the colour of the anemone," these two princes were decapitated and their heads were carried on lances through the province of Khorassan, as a warning to their followers.

Jelal ed din had already broken through the cordon, thus gaining the first victory that had been won for his side, and was pursuing his way towards Ghazni by way of Kandahar.

The ultimate fate of his two remaining brothers, Rokn ed din and Ghiyats ed din, is soon told. The first named was with his father when Mahommed fled to Irak, and when defeated he retired to the frontier of Kerman, where he continued to rule. After nine months, he tried to return to his own country, but was besieged by the Mongols in a citadel that fell to their assaults and was assassinated in the hour of defeat by one of his own followers. Of that luckless garrison, the poet sang again in melancholy strain :

"One night they lay under covers of silk,
The next they were covered with earth.
The same fate fell on hands that carried the lance,
As on those that were tinted with henna." ¹

¹ Mahmoud En Nesawi.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Ghiyats ed din, who had been lurking in Kerman, then took possession of Irak and his authority extended for a time over Khorassan and Mazanderan. But discord prevailed in these countries and Ghiyats ed din, too weak to hold his own, was lured by those old time communists, the Ismailians, to their fortress of Alamut. Here he was kept a miserable prisoner, till at last the Assassins allowed him to escape, only that he might be murdered, beyond their walls.

To return to the main narrative. Urgendj, deserted by the princes, was besieged for seven months and the citizens put up a desperate defence. When the place was finally taken, women and even children joined in the fight for life from street to street, during a whole week. After this, none were spared except maidens and infants. The artisans and skilled workmen were given the choice of death or captivity in Mongolia, but many preferred to meet a quick and honourable end. Ogotai, who was in supreme command, as Juchi and Jagatai constantly quarrelled, then ordered the wholesale pillage of the city, and when it had been stripped bare the sluices of the Oxus were opened and the town was flooded.

Certain poor families had escaped the fury of the Mongols, by hiding among the ruins. Their last hope left them as the muddy water, carrying swollen corpses of their kindred, rushed in.

Ancient Urgendj still exists, standing on both banks of the Oxus.

Chingiz himself now led a new and terrific campaign against other cities, and began by laying siege to Termez, which commanded the main crossing of the Oxus from Bokhara to Balkh. The city was captured in nine days and all the inhabitants, driven beyond the suburbs, fell in a ghastly massacre.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

One old woman promised a pearl of great price in reward for her life. When questioned as to its whereabouts, fear overtook her and she spoke the truth—"I have swallowed it! Have mercy!"

They did not know the word and proved her honesty by ripping open her body. A good hiding-place indeed! Other precious stones might well be thus secreted, by other people. Then began a series of dreadful atrocities impelled by greed.

And these deeds were countenanced and encouraged by Chingiz, yet does he deserve all the censure that attaches to his name thereby? From boyhood he had set himself to build an empire, that should endure for longerth an a day Like every other great conqueror he found now that the tools he used could only be kept sharpened by the appeal to the baser passions.

War, which is the abnegation of reason, permits of no scruples. He only wins who is the most formidable, and modern ideals notwithstanding, ancient or mediæval resources of the cruellest type can bear comparison with the armaments of science.

Whether it is better to be trampled by elephants or crushed by tanks, to be disembowelled by the sword or by high explosive, to be boiled alive or to be slowly burned to death with mustard gas, who shall say? It is well to remember also, that the methods of Chingiz were the fashion of his day, and that the barbarities of the Mongols were always equalled and often exceeded by their opponents. In fact, when they wished to inspire the greatest terror they employed the enemy.

A contemporary Mahomedan writer,¹ who cannot be suspected of excusing the Mongols, to whom he invariably refers as "the accursed," says:

¹ En Nesawi.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

"They were helped in Khorassan by an individual called Habech of Kahidja, in the province of Nishapur. He was a general. He was placed at the head of the renegades and had charge of siege engines and directed infantry. Through this man the population had to endure the most terrible evils. He threw himself into the most abominable enterprises and sent messages to all the towns of Khorassan, that were protected with ramparts and moats and had mosques, to enjoin each of the important chiefs that were in command to come to him in person, accompanied by their ministers and armed with everything they could collect in the way of siege materials. As soon as they responded to his appeal, he carried all these people off to besiege some other town, took it and inflicted on the inhabitants an exemplary chastisement. If any chief made a pretext for not stirring from his home, Habech marched on the place, besieged it and hunted out the personage and all the inhabitants, whom he put to the sword or killed in some other fashion."

D'Ohsson, referring to another Mahomedan writer,¹ who was perhaps not so disinterested, says: "He made himself spontaneously the panegyrist of the Barbarians. . . . He speaks only with profound veneration of Tchingiuz Khan and his descendants. . . . He does more: he shows in his preface that the devastation of so many Mahomedan countries by the Mongol arms was a necessary evil, from which proceeded two advantages, the one spiritual, the other temporal."

Apart from the fulfilment of the conqueror's plan or the justice of that plan, however, it cannot be denied that there developed within him at this time, a blood-lust. War, as he conducted it, became too logical, too much a matter of widespread massacre. It passed beyond its natural limits

¹ Alaï ed din Atta Mulk Djouvéini, author of the "Tarikh Djiha-kushai or History of the Conqueror of the World."

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

of kind preying on kind and became a frenzy. The fiery sword he carried dripped red and its splendour was dimmed. Death the councillor usurped the judgment of Chingiz the man and the fame of Chingiz was thereby for ever tarnished.

When he had done with Termez, he held in the neighbourhood a grand hunt of wild game, that lasted for four months. The troops formed a circle, enclosing a vast area, and gradually drew in, driving before them herds of wild asses and antelopes, civet cats, hyenas and even lions. In the central flowery plain, the sportsmen armed with lances and bows and arrows waited for the battle.

An early Persian miniature gives an idea of the scene. The horsemen, with lifted arms, gallop over a ground blooming like the pictures of Botticelli, in pursuit of skipping gazelles, rushing bucks and stampeding asses. Peacocks and parrots fly among the trees. A lion lurks in the undergrowth. . . .

The sense of slaughter is overlaid by the sense of movement. The picture, crowded with figures of men and beasts, is like a shout of ecstasy, half terror, half triumph.

Chingiz only paused now from killing humans to kill creatures that he loved far better. For the time he had forgotten his desire for a friend and an equal. Being omnipotent, he had no need of Prester John.

He was now undisputed master of all the country north of the Oxus, and, deciding to cross the river, he dispersed the fleet defending it with Chinese stink-pots, and advanced on Balkh.

That old and lovely city, like a jewel of moonstone set in silver, had been left unmolested by the army of Chebé Noyan and seemed to smile in her sleep before the eyes of Chingiz. But she might awake to become a stronghold.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Therefore she could not be left alive in their wake. The inhabitants sent a deputation of submission with rich presents to the conqueror. It availed them nothing. Under the pretext of making a census, Chingiz directed that all the people should assemble outside the walls.

There they were counted and killed. Then the town was utterly demolished.

Balkh, the mother of cities, who had smiled on so many rulers, smiled no more. She is nothing now but an insignificant collection of mud-walled buildings, surrounded with ruins.

Nussret-i-Kub, in the Talekan district, was the next place to feel the Khan's fury. The people defended themselves for six months against thundering catapults, reared on a huge earth mound, and found themselves fighting against their own countrymen, prisoners of the Mongols, who were placed in the forefront of the battle. The city was eventually vanquished and of its buildings not one stone remained on another.

Meanwhile Tului, the fierce wolf cub, more blood-thirsty even than his father Chingiz, was absent ravaging Khorassan, then the first province of Persia and the richest region on earth.

He had been dispatched in the Spring of 1221, soon after Jelal ed din's escape from Urgendj, to capture the young Shah. His principal general, Togachar, was also his sister's husband and this woman accompanied him on the campaign.

The vanguard under Togachar advanced on Nessa, too late to catch Jelal, and when the city was taken men, women and children were herded on the plain and killed to the number of seventy thousand in revenge for the fact that Togachar had met his death during the siege. Then Tului attacked

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Merv, a city as old and as beautiful as Balkh and still more renowned in Persian story and in Sanscrit poetry. She had been favoured by the Seldjuk sultans and she occupied a flowery plain, fertilised by the Murghab or Bird river. Her aspect was that of some gracious lady in spreading, gorgeous robes and the water which flowed past her walls was like a dove escaping from her hands.

Too fair was she and too luxurious for her government to be strong. Within a week she was doomed. The sorties of her garrison were repulsed with violence. Her walls were so closely surrounded that not a soul could escape.

The governor sent a venerable Imam to treat with Tului and the Mongol answer was so favourable that presently the governor went himself, carrying valuable presents. Tului's words were all honeyed, but unlike his father, he lied.

When the principal men of the city were in his power, he forced them to reveal the names of the wealthiest merchants and to deliver two hundred of them, with all their property and four hundred artisans. Then his troops entered the city and every man was ordered to go out with his family and everything he valued. So great was the multitude that four days were occupied in the doleful exodus. Seated on a golden throne, that had been erected under a silken canopy on the plain, Tului watched the people pass. The six hundred hostages he had claimed were grouped at one side. He gave a signal and suddenly his soldiers, fell on the six hundred and killed them all, before the eyes of their friends.

A wail of horror rose from the citizens of Merv. Some tried to escape across the river and were shot down with arrows, others attempted to fly back into the town and were speared in the gateway, others threw themselves flat on the

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

earth as though longing for it to open and cover them, and were trampled by the rushing horsemen. Hundreds of thousands of corpses were left from that most dreadful massacre. And when the Mongols departed Merv was not.

Her walls once radiant with azure, vermilion and gold were levelled to the dust.

Her palaces were smoking sepulchres. The lovely tomb of the great Khalif, Haroun Al Raschid of "A Thousand And One Nights," fame was destroyed. In her courts jackals howled, and in her ruined gardens wild beasts made their lairs.

The Bird River, stained red, flew past that place of desolation and there was no healing in its wings.

Tului went on for twelve days and came to Nishapur, the seat of learning. The people prepared a brave defence by mounting on their walls three thousand ballistas to shoot javelins and five hundred catapults to hurl huge stones.

First Tului laid waste all the surrounding country, then he brought up his siege engines. He also had three thousand ballistas and three hundred catapults, but he had besides seven hundred machines to throw pots of burning naptha and four thousand scaling ladders, also moving towers, by which to approach the level of the walls. The fighting was indescribable. The air was thick with the rain of arrows and spears. By day large rocks hurtled to and fro and crushed a dozen men at a time as they fell on either side.¹ By night, flaming oil lit the scene with a hellish glow as it poured over the walls.

The tumult never ceased. Tului did not ask for sur-

¹ When the supply of stones failed, the Mongols used blocks of wood soaked in water, till they attained the weight and hardness of granite.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

render His object was extermination, for there was a vengeful woman beside him, his sister, the widow of Togachar, maddened with the grief of her loss.

At last the Mongols made a general assault, all round the walls. In twenty-four hours, the moat was brimfull of bodies and the way was clear through seventy separate breaches. Ten thousand warriors, headed by the amazon who had inspired them, rushed in, another ten thousand followed and more and more penetrated the city, cutting down all before them.

The slaughter continued for four days. No living creature, whether man or beast escaped. A dog ran down a street. It was caught on a lance point and tossed aside. A cat sat in a doorway ; it was pierced through the heart by an arrow.

As the shrieking people called on Allah the Mongols mocked them crying "La illahi !"

They rode like demons, laughing aloud and singing, drunk with blood. And the widow of Togachar urged them on with fearful words.

"Kill ! kill ! In Merv some may have escaped. It is said that the living lay down among the dead, feigning to be of their number. Let not this happen now. Kill and make certain of killing by cutting off every head."

She was obeyed and, to satisfy her, three ghastly heaps were made—one of the heads of men, another of the heads of women, another of the heads of children. Dressed like a warrior in leather and carrying a sword in her hand, she went to survey them.

At the first she paused and cried in a loud voice, "Togachar, you are avenged."

At the second she stopped again and said, "Lucky are they who share the fate of their husbands."

But at the third, she was silent for a while. And when

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

she spoke at last, her voice was low, "Oh, Togachar, had I born you a son, this might not have happened."

The city of Nishapur was wiped out. Where it had stood, the Mongols ploughed the land and sowed barley.

Herat was the last fortified place left in Khorassan. By the time Tului came to it, even he was satiated with slaughter. Though its inhabitants killed the envoy he sent to them and fought desperately for eight days, he welcomed their final offer of surrender and promising to spare all, except those who were determined to support Jelal ed din, kept his word.

Perhaps he was impelled to this leniency by parental authority. For he knew that he had exceeded the orders of Chingiz, and about this time a peremptory message came, recalling him to his father. The wolf cub was whistled to heel.

Staying only to appoint a Mongol commandant and a Mahomedan governor at Herat, he hastened to obey the summons. Chingiz held his sons to a discipline as severe as that which controlled his army. When Juchi and Jagatai quarrelled, Ogotai had been placed in supreme command, but Juchi, the first born son of Bortai, could not bear what he considered an affront. Jagatai called him bastard and this so infuriated and wounded Juchi, who thus learnt at last the circumstances preceding his birth, that he swore he would never again face the man whom he had called father.

Ogotai and Jagatai returned from Urgendj to Chingiz, near Talekan, but Juchi left them and went north of Lake Aral, where he laid the foundations of the monarchy of Kipchak, known later as the Golden Horde.

Though Chingiz had always treated Juchi as his own son, he did not grieve over this separation, which cleared the way for the legitimate succession of Ogotai.

And now it is worth while to consider the state of the

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

whole country, in which the greatest campaign of Chingiz was conducted.

Northern Turkestan, and notably Transoxiana, with its fairest cities in ruins and its canals destroyed, reverted to its original condition of desert, except on the actual lines of its two great rivers, the Jaxartes and the Oxus. Years passed before fugitives dared creep out from caves in the mountains and holes in the sandy earth, to divert once more the living waters for the slow reconstruction of some sort of civilisation.

And when this was done, when at last a new Bokhara, a new Samarcand were built, it was only that eventually they should come under an administration, that had all the vices of the Mongols and none of their virtues.

The Russian government of this region to-day cannot claim to have brought to it any of the advantages of the west.

All it has done is to establish a position so pregnant with possibilities, that before very long the eyes of the whole world must once more turn towards central Asia, to watch the outcome between Chinese-Mongol commercial enterprise and Russian-Mongol force of arms.

Khorassan, the land of "lilies and languors" and "roses and raptures," was a wilderness. Once like a jewel of enamel, glowing with the colours of gems and crowded with the forms of flowers, it lay blackened, smashed, ruined. Nightingales no longer sang in its gardens. Poets no longer discoursed of love and wine in its palaces. The bones of its warriors, its women and its children crumbled in the soil.

Yet, as though so much blood had fertilised this soil better than any water, it is noteworthy that the artistic renaissance of Persia happened very soon after the Mongol conquest, and rose to its height under Mongol dominion. The influence of the Chinese, whose learning and culture

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

had always been appreciated in the country, made itself apparent almost immediately in painting, and the Persian miniatures of this period, intrinsically Chinese in style, are superior to anything produced earlier. Their subjects, moreover, are chiefly of Mongul characters—a foregone conclusion perhaps since there were no other patrons, but one which shows that the conqueror could and did encourage the art. The Mongol (or Mogul) dynasty of Persia and India encouraged it so well indeed, that the finest examples of miniature painting in the world belong to the reigns of Timurlane and Shah Jehan.

This then was one result of Chingiz Khan's invasion. Another result was politically far-reaching. A few Turkomans, Kankalis, did escape from the neighbourhood of Merv, and, fleeing westward, settled near Angora under their chieftain, whose name was Ertogrul. They numbered in all no more than four hundred and forty families. The impulse that drove them from the sword enabled them to form the nucleus of the Ottoman Empire, which, but for the terror of the sword, would never have attained such fame.

CHAPTER XIX

THE horrors associated with the name of Mongol have, in this record, deliberately not been minimised. At the same time, it is worthy of note, that history has hitherto magnified these horrors.

While the Infidels^W were attacking Islam on the East, other infidels from the Mahomedan historian's point of view, namely the Crusaders, were attacking on the West, and the result, very naturally, was an extremity of terror destructive to judgment. This terror was also naturally inspired by the stronger force and, as its devastations spread to the West of Asia, panic penetrated as far as Bysantium. Here, the Emperor furnished his fortress against the menace with provisions and arms, and his subjects, trembling at all the rumoured atrocities of the Tartars, believed that these conquerors had the heads of dogs and that their food was human flesh.¹

But now let the truth be considered.

The Mongols defeated the Turks by superior hardihood and by superior discipline. They were stronger and braver men than their opponents. Their senses of smell, hearing and sight, like those of wild animals, were of an astonishing fineness. They were born to war. Throughout their ranks obedience to superior orders was absolute. D'Ohsson records: "By the will of Chingiz, if a chief of troops had committed any fault, the sovereign to punish him need only send the least of his subjects: the general, even if he were at the other end of the world or at the head

¹ D'Ohsson.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

of a hundred thousand men, had to submit with respect to the orders carried by a simple messenger, to stretch himself on the ground if he had to receive the bastinado, to give up his head if he were condemned to death. Among the Turks, on the other hand, it was rare that a general who had become powerful through his riches or through personal influence did not take arms against his master."

Peculation and intrigue ruled in the Turkish army. Cowards were in the majority. They yielded themselves as prisoners in thousands.

There is only one account of a Mongol captive. He, finding himself taken, threw himself from his horse and dashed his head against a rock, preferring death to dishonour.

Many of the Mongols were Nestorian Christians. In 1260 there was, indeed, a Mongol Crusade to the Holy Land, led by a contemporary veteran of Subotai the Valiant, and this soldier of the Cross was killed at the Battle of the Springs of Goliath, near Jerusalem.

In the autumn of 1221, Chingiz Khan set out to pursue Jelal ed din, who had gathered at Ghazni an army of some sixty thousand men, mainly composed of Kankalis, Turcomans and mixed tribes from the Indus and Ganges. Since so strong a force could not be left to take a chance of re-establishing the Kwaresmain Empire, the great Khan determined to fall on it straightway from the north across the Hindu Kush.

He marched in person at the head of his army, which was so large "that," says the chronicle, "the plains were too narrow to contain the soldiers." Starting from Bokhara, he did not go through the famous Iron Gate, but went by way of a neighbouring rocky defile, known as the Stone Gate. With him went his two sons, Jagatai and Tului. They were detained for a month by the strong frontier

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

fortress of Kerduan (specially mentioned by Raschid), but, when they had destroyed it and all its defenders, they proceeded into the province of Bamian. This country was then a centre of Buddhist pilgrims, who converged on it from the north-east.

Fahsien, the Chinese traveller and the most notable of those devout and courageous pioneers, went there in the year 403 and left a significant account of his dreadful journey across the T'sung ling range.

"These mountains," he said, "are infested with venomous dragons, which, when provoked, spit forth poisonous winds and cause showers of snow and storms of sand and gravel."

Though the Mongols coming from the north-west did not experience such frightful difficulties, the season must have made them equally glad to reach the pleasant valley of Bamian, sheltered by its reddish coloured hills.

They entered a gorge, on each side of which enormous figures, standing as much as one hundred and seventy feet high, were carved out of the conglomerate rock, coated with cement and adorned with gilt and colours. These giant saints of Buddhism must have appealed strongly to the weary pilgrims, who came to do them honour. But on the Mongols, as on all other armies, who intruded on their peace, how they must have frowned !

Massive buildings bordered the cliffs, which were pierced with caves, and at the southern end of the gorge the acropolis of Bamian crowned an isolated rock, standing in the middle of the valley.¹

Chingiz now sent on a force of thirty thousand men under Tului to attack Jelal ed din with all haste at Ghazni, while he himself stayed to besiege the stronghold of Bamian.

Its position and the spiritual significance that the place

¹ Holdich.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

had for its defenders made of the attack a most bitter conflict.

While arrows rained from the heights and the Mongols climbed the impregnable cliffs again and again, the giants of the gorge looked on, still, aloof and disdainful, preserving that attitude of perfect calm which has been theirs through the ages.

The courage of men was what they knew. For hundreds and hundreds of years they had beheld it and accepted it as the link between divine and human nature. They had seen pilgrims, spent and starving, upheld only by the ecstasy of faith.

They had seen explorers, urged by the pure passion for truth.

They had seen conquerors with captives of many nations in their train and countless warriors and war elephants, advancing proudly into the Unknown.

And to all these little men, their own dignity had spoken the same greeting:

“Pass, brave hearts, to your destiny. For in this world all is illusion, except the spirit that brought you here and we who remain.”

Greater than the silent guardians of the tumuli in the Mongol homeland, yet their impassivity must have inspired Chingiz afresh with fierce resolve.

Moatugan, the young son of Jagatai and the favourite grandson of Chingiz (notable in that he left a child of whom Timur the Terrible was the direct descendant), fought his first action before Bamian. In the darkness, when tumult reigned, he dropped to a sword thrust of the enemy and in the morning his mutilated body was found by his own men.

The news was reported first to the great Khan. Jagatai was absent that day on a reconnaissance. When he returned, Chingiz summoned him to a feast in the royal tent and pretended to be dissatisfied with his work.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

"In all things I have followed your commands, oh ! my father," protested Jagatai, surprised.

"Yet you would not always obey me," said Chingiz, with a stern and terrible look.

"May I perish dishonoured if I ever fail to obey," answered Jagatai.

"Give me your two hands, oh ! my son," said Chingiz.

"Now meet my eyes and listen and obey. Moatugan is dead. Weep not."

Two strong men looked on each other.

Jagatai, obedient to the command of Chingiz, went out of the tent and buckled on his sword.

That same night the fortress of Bamian was taken, but no booty rewarded the conquerors. Chingiz had issued this order : "Moatugan shall be avenged. No living thing, whether human, animal or vegetable, shall be left alive in the citadel of Bamian and, where that citadel now stands, the site shall be renamed Mobalig, city of woe !"

He led the assault himself. Throwing off his helmet, he climbed, the first of the escalade, bareheaded, that all might see their Khan in the breach.

His order was logically and implicitly fulfilled. All that lived on the summits of the cliffs or within the acropolis perished. All that had any value or beauty was broken or burned. The buildings crowning the gorge were razed to the ground. The fortress on its isolated rock became a mere heap of stones, and no native of the country dared to approach that accursed spot for a hundred years.

Only the carved figures of the gorge remained undamaged. And as Chingiz rode between these Silent Ones they seemed again to say : "Pass, mortals to your destiny ! You leave behind you Mobalig, city of woe, yet all the blood that has been shed cannot give back one young life."

Regret fell on Chingiz as he left that valley of desolation.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

For the first time in his great career, he found that the end of slaughter did not justify the means.

He was not one, however, to indulge vain remorse. Soon came news that compelled the full attention of his military genius. Disaster had befallen the force that had gone in advance under Tului.

Jelal ed din had attacked them suddenly at Parwan¹ and had inflicted on them the first serious reverse that the Mongol arms had sustained. Their losses had been enormous and Tului himself, with only a few survivors, brought the tidings.

No time could now be lost in reaching Ghazni. There were rumours that the Turks, inflamed by victory, were quarrelling over their loot and that in consequence the Kankalis as usual were defecting.

The Mongol army, marched rapidly on and for forty-eight hours, did not pause even to cook food. They reached Ghazni just fifteen days too late to catch Jelal ed din.

The rumours had been true, and the young Shah had been forced to abandon the city, but upheld by intrepid courage, though suffering from ill-health at the time, he had refused to be carried in a litter and was riding now towards the Indus, gathering reinforcements from all sides.

Then—was it due to the influence of the Silent Ones in the gorge of Bamian, was it the final bright flame of a dying ambition, almost satiated with conquest?—a dream surely revived in the heart of Chingiz, the dream of finding at long last a friend, an ally, an equal—Prester John.

The illusion, the longing possessed him. No man had ever resisted him with such mettle and such success as this son of Shah Mahommed.

¹ Called Beiruan or Peruan in the records, this place was no doubt near the site of the modern Chankar, overlooking Kabul.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Jelal ed din Mankobirti laid claim to no territory wider than that of the Kwaresmian Empire, but already it was whispered of him that the power which could snatch victory from disaster was something more than mortal. He was so different to his father, so superior to any of his brothers, that he might be considered as a being apart.

The divine quality that actuated him was courage, and Chingiz knew now that this was the pure virtue essential to the figure he had so long desired to find. Valour and Might, these were the characteristics of Prester John, that had failed to appear completely or lastingly in Yelui Tashi, in Wang Khan or in Kushluk. Might and Valour, these were the characteristics of Chingiz himself, calling to his counterpart.

If Jelal ed din was great enough to defeat the Mongols, his identification was proved, his immortal fame was established, and Chingiz would claim his alliance with joy. What a combat was here ! To test his dream, Chingiz must use his utmost resources. Victory over Mankobirti would spell disillusion ; defeat supreme realisation.

The great Khan stopped only to leave a governor at Ghazni and sped on to the Indus, his object to prevent the young Shah from crossing the strong barrier of that river with his army.

Ride, ride, Mongol horsemen, to reach the enemy in the open, before he can hide in the mountains and lie in the deep gorges !

Rush, centaurs, for in the day of battle, gloriously shall strength be shown !

They stayed not to ravage the land. For meat and drink they cut their horses' veins and sucked the blood and stopped the wound and mounted and galloped on again. Mercilessly they pressed on the heels of the retreating army, but Jelal ed din kept ahead, steady and undismayed.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

He was proving his worth. His valour and his might were standing the test. Oh ! Prester John ! The heart of Chingiz swelled with expectation.

They were very near the river now. Suddenly one night there was an attack on the leading troops of the Mongols. They were taken by surprise on the flank, separated from the main force and annihilated. In the morning the attackers had vanished.

Chingiz was now convinced that at last he would meet his equal.

There was no time for Jelal ed din to cross the river, so on its edge he ranged his army, which numbered only thirty thousand against the immense Mongol host. The disposition of his force was, however, favourable. The left wing was covered by an apparently impassable mountain, that fell in a sheer cliff to the water. The right flank was protected by the Indus, flowing through a steep gorge.

The two armies could therefore only meet face to face.

The desperate encounter was set suitably in that wild and gloomy scene. The month was November and the river ran deep and swift and turbid, between its precipitous banks.

A rope bridge, looking in that vast area like a thread of cobweb, spanned its breadth. Clouds drifted over the shrub covered slopes and over the rocks of red and yellow sandstone.

The battle began at break of day. With their left wing the Mongols made a furious onset on the right of the Shah's army and were repulsed by such a hail of javelins and arrows, that it seemed as though the Indus itself had risen from its bed and descended on them in rods of steel.

At the same time, Jelal ed din in person attacked the Mongol centre with extraordinary vigour. Mounted on a black charger, richly caparisoned, his heron plumed helm

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

gleaming with jewels, his armour shining like the sun, he fought like a god of old and inspired faith in all who beheld him. He was magnificent, invincible, a Shah of Shahs !

At the head of a chosen band of warriors, among whom was Timur Melik, hero of Khodjend, and accompanied by his standard bearer, he wielded his scimitar with deadly effect on the Mongols. Wherever the battle raged most furiously, there was he in the midst, with his flashing blade and his tossing plume and his banner carried proudly aloft.

The Turkomans, assured of victory by his presence, yelled their jubilant war cries and gloried in the ecstasy of revenge for past defeats. The hillmen, who had joined them in their retreat, and the Punjaubis, who had come to them from the southern plains—faithful Mussalmen all, grinned in their beards and laughed aloud as they speared a fleeing horseman or, locked in a death grip, plunged their daggers into an enemy's back.

The centaurs had met their match at last, in men more terrible, more deeply inspired by hate than themselves.

And then Jelal ed din and Chingiz Khan met ; the Very Valourous and the Very Mighty beheld one another.

Each raised his sword in salute.

The Shah, in shining armour, cried, " Hail, oh ! Khan ! "

The conqueror, clad in rough leather with a plain circlet of gold round his hide helmet, answered quickly, " Are you he whom I seek ? "

" I am Mankobirti, son and successor of Mohommed ! "

He waved the scimitar above his head.

In another moment it would have descended on Chingiz, who stayed strangely immobile, waiting, had not a Mongol diverted the blow, so that it fell instead on the neck of the Khan's horse. The beast dropped to its knees.

Jelal ed din was instantly engaged, in fighting for his life with swarming warriors.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Hastily remounting Chingiz, his body-guard carried him into another part of the field.

In the Mongol ranks, the cry went up that the Khan had fallen. When this was disproved, there was still cause for terror. It was known that the left wing had been driven back ; now all was surely lost, for the centre was broken.

In that confined space, surrounded by frowning hills, the Mongols had not been able to employ their customary tactics of feigned retreat and swift encircling attack. Their sturdy horses, inured to every hardship on the march, but requiring open plains on which to move freely, had not the speed or agility of the Turkish steeds.

The centaurs, robbed of half their strength, were for the first time disorganised and broken, by an enemy greatly inferior in numbers.

With a most strange light in his eyes, Chingiz rode among his warriors, encouraging them by his presence and forbidding despair. When the battle had continued throughout the day, and night fell, he withdrew his troops to a little distance and held a council of war.

The end was not yet. Losses had been tremendous on both sides, and the action remained indecisive.

The ground was littered with the dead, the dying, and all the wastage of the terrific struggle. The darkness was rent with the shrill wailing of women in both camps, and the cries of the wounded, left where they fell. As an accompaniment to these sounds, the rushing waters of the Indus spoke perpetually of an eternal force, terrible, merciless, omnipotent.

The two great rivers of India, the Indus and the Ganges, like the two great rivers of Turkestan, the Jaxartes and the Oxus, symbolise the dual nature of life.

Ganges is the holy Mother, the purifier, the healer, but

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Indus, the many-armed, is the strong Father, the vitaliser, the law giver. On these two, Northern India depends for existence as Turkestan depends on Jaxartes the Mother and Oxus the Father.

Chingiz saw the near realisation of a mystical dream, and saw too that the only way to prove it or to save his army from disaster was to achieve what appeared impossible. Jelal ed din's left wing, protected by the impassable cliff, but weakened in its force by the reinforcements that must have been sent from it to the victorious right wing on the river, had somehow to be outflanked.

"This thing cannot be done, oh Khan."

"It must be done."

"Without the power of eagles, how can the barrier be surmounted?"

"By my will," answered Chingiz, and he proceeded to lay his plan before his generals.

Ten thousand picked men were to be chosen. Under cover of darkness, they were to go forth and scale the cliff. They were to gain foothold by driving wooden pegs into the sandstone and into the earth; they were to climb on each others' shoulders, lightly armed, with bows and arrows on their backs, and swords held between their teeth; they were to creep like snakes over the bare rock and like wolves they were to run over the summit, and descend on the enemy in the rear. He recalled their past endeavours and conquests. Were they to fail now when the whole of India lay before them, when Turkestan and Persia, waiting for the outcome of this struggle, lay behind?

He spoke of his own youth and told them how, as a boy, he had won his way out of Mount Targunai, the terrible place that had tried to keep his bones, and how later he had escaped from the Taidjuts by the impassable ways of Mount Burhan.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

“To me and mine, barriers are a road, walls are bridges, impenetrable paths are open !”

He filled them with his unquenchable purpose.

They went. And every one of that ten thousand carried within him the spirit of Chingiz, knew that formidable rocks, slippery stones, the bare earth itself were not obstacles, but the natural friends of brave men.

They went, strangers in a strange land, daring a passage that no native of the country could have ventured, under such circumstances.

They went, believing God was with them and won through unimaginable peril and difficulty, across the sheer face of the cliff, on the edge of profound and black abysses.

Then they descended the further side, burst through the rear of the enemy, and while a fresh attack was launched by Chingiz from the front, Jelal ed din's centre was pierced and his enfeebled left wing was destroyed.

The dawn of day dispelled on the one side a practical ambition, on the other side a vain dream.

Shah Jelal ed din Mankobirti was vanquished.

Yet the Very Valourous who had failed only in might, met the failure of his hopes as nobly as he had grasped at temporary success.

When all was lost, his harem, consisting of his mother and his wives, cried to him to kill them rather than to let them fall into the hands of the enemy. He found time to grant their wish. Then, rallying a remnant of his army, a part of which sought safety in flight across the river, he charged the Mongol lines with barely seven thousand men, and so ferocious was that dying onset, as of a wounded lion, that the line was actually driven back for some distance from the bank of the Indus.

The green flag of Islam still waved above the heads of

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

the faithful, the black heron plume still marked the helmet of their sovereign and leader. But as he rode, as more and more of his followers fell to the winged arrows of circling horsemen, all knew that the end of the desperate effort was only a matter of moments.

Suddenly the standard bearer was struck down. Jelal ed din grasped the broken staff, before the Crescent could touch the ground. Then holding it high, he wheeled his black steed and faced his men.

The wild onrush did not cease. The Mahommedans, maddened to ecstasy by the symbol of their faith, cast themselves on the levelled spears of the enemy and died shouting the holy name of Allah.

Then Jelal ed din cast off his armour and, retaining only on his left shoulder his jewelled shield, and in his right hand the standard, he spurred his horse towards the bank of the Indus.

From the ranks of the Mongols went up the cry, "The Shah escapes!" followed at once by the command of Chingiz, "He must be taken alive and treated with honour."

The black horse galloped hard. The Mongols, headed by their Khan, poured after him in pursuit. He swerved as he reached the brink and took a track leading to a higher outcrop of rock, jutting above the waters.

Chingiz was the first to view him as he paused there, and, at the word of Chingiz, the Mongol warriors halted to see the lion at bay.

Jelal ed din presented at that moment a glorious figure. His raiment of scarlet and gold glowed in a shaft of sunlight, which, through the moisture of flying spray and drifting mist, cast a rainbow like a fairy bridge, seemingly more substantial than the cobweb work of man, across the Indus. The expression of his young, bearded face, revealed in this radiance, was lofty, melancholy and serene. About his whole person, there was the glamour, the romance, the poetry of lost causes.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

As he stopped on the western bank of the Indus, his back was to his northern homeland, his face was to the enervating south which lay across the eastern bank. Neither the shield nor the standard to which he clung could save him now. Only with these emblems could he find peace in the waters of oblivion.

The black horse neighed. At the same instant, he reared to the prick of deep dug spurs, pawed the empty air and plunged into the roaring flood sixty feet below.

A shout of amazement and admiration broke from the Mongol host.

As though asking a question of Fate, Chingiz himself cried, "How could Shah Mahommed have been the father of this man!"

A cloud covered the sun. The rainbow bridge melted.

In the distance, presently the figures of horse and rider appeared struggling in the water. And at last, far down the stream, these little figures, dwarfed to insignificance, robbed of all splendour, emerged on the further bank. Father Indus had cast forth the body of the son who trusted him.

Not in water but in wine would Jelal ed din now seek and find oblivion. His heart was broken, his soul was dead. The corruption that was in his bones, through the treachery it induced, was to prove his undoing.

And the last prophecy of Shah Mahommed was fulfilled.

The dream melted like the rainbow.

Yet though it was never spoken by Chingiz, who failed to find in any man his equal, among the many historical figures identified as Prester John, Jelal ed din, the Gift of God, is mentioned.¹

¹ "In Plano Carpini's single mention of Prester John as the King of the Christians of India the Greater who, defeats the Tartars. . . . Oppert recognises Sultan Jelaluddin of Kwaresm and his temporary success over the Mongols in Afghanistan."—*Yule*.

CHAPTER XX

ABOUT four thousand men of Jelal ed din's army escaped across the Indus. According to the chronicle, when they reached the eastern bank, "They had neither clothes nor footwear : they appeared like the newly risen on the Day of Judgment, at the moment when they shall leave their tombs."¹

The sons of Mankobirti, who were all young children, were captured by the conqueror, and were drowned like puppies in the fast flowing river, that no heir of the family might survive.

Chingiz then sent two generals with a strong army to pursue the Shah. They followed his flight to Delhi as far as Multan, but, as this city resisted their investment with great courage and as they found themselves meanwhile attacked by a more insidious foe in the shape of disease, they abandoned the siege and retired northwards, ravaging on their way Lahore, Peshawur and Melikpur. The hot and dusty land of India did not suit the Mongols then or thereafter. The Emperor Baber wrote of it in his famous Memoirs : "Neither good horses, nor tender meat, no ice and no fresh water ; not even a candlestick !"

The army recrossed the Indus and continued to retreat slowly along the western bank. When they reached Ghazni, Ogotai stayed to destroy that splendid city. All that is now left of its ancient glories are two minarets and a waste of crumbling ruins, around which the little glass bracelets of women and pieces of broken pottery may still be found.

¹ Mahmoud En Nesawi.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

A division now went in advance to subdue Herat, the one important town of Khorassan that Tului had spared.

Herat, the capital of the province of Gur, had, on the news of Jelal ed din's victory at Perwan, risen in revolt and had made common cause against the Mongol governor who had been left there, with the people of Kaliun or Nerretu, an adjacent mountain fortress, of such impregnable position that it had successfully resisted, so far, the attacks of the horsemen.

Together the people of Kaliun and Herat murdered every enemy within their gates, but retribution overtook them before long. The Mongol division besieged Herat for six month and sixteen days, and a desperate resistance did not avail to save many hundred thousand inhabitants from slaughter.

Yet still a few remained alive. Herat was like a strong man pierced with a myriad wounds and still refusing to die. In the ruins, two thousand indomitable souls lurked. The Mongols, having abandoned the stricken place, returned, found breath within it and slew again. Sixteen refugees fled to a mountain peak, waited their opportunity and crept back to Herat, where they were joined by twenty-four brothers in misfortune.

The total population of forty persons hid in a shattered mosque, the only building that remained in the city, and Herat survived. It was unique in this distinction throughout Khorassan.

In Merv, indeed, a few souls had lingered, probably those who, according to the fierce widow of Togachur, had feigned death among innumerable corpses. But the watchful Mongols summoned every one to death, by commanding Muezzins to call them to prayer from the minarets. As the faithful confidently obeyed the Voice, they went to Allah and were at peace. For forty one days were they thus

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

called. At the end the Voice spoke no more, and Merv was still.

The invincibility of Herat and the martyrdom of Merv availed the cause of Jelal ed din little.

After gaining some adherents in India, and marrying an Indian princess he returned to Persia and invaded Georgia and Armenia. Arrayed once more in all the panoply of the gorgeous East, he appeared to his supporters like a hero of romance. At Ispahan he gained the title of Sultan, altered later to Shah in Shah, by the Khalifate, with whom he made peace.

But there was no real strength in him, the victories he gained were insignificant and during the desperate struggle, which lasted for six years, he was beset by treachery.

After the death of Chingiz, he was hunted by the Mongols under one of Ogotai's generals, as his father Shah Mahommed had been hunted by Chebé Noyan and Subotai.

He perished miserably at last, murdered by a false guide, a hill man of the Kurd tribe, but he had lost long since everything but life, and the grave of his ambition had been the Indus.

It is best to remember him at that last glorious moment, with his standard in his hand and his shield upon his shoulder, calm, grave and kingly, before wine and pleasure worked the ruin of a splendid body and a splendid soul.

In the spring of 1223, the main army of Chingiz was still encamped on the right bank of the Indus, where the winter had been spent. Rest had recuperated the Mongol forces, but they sickened for their homeland and rumours of events in Turkestan and of fresh revolt in Tangut were rife.

Disease had taken its toll of the hardy horsemen and they had no wish to linger in a foreign land.

Moreover, a strange melancholy had descended on the

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

conqueror himself with the final fading of his dream. He knew how that he could never meet in any man his equal. He stood alone in the world. None of his sons could ever attain such glory and renown and he recalled the words of Hoelun, his mother, that even he would only be remembered as the greatest slayer of human beings that had ever lived.

The blood lust left him. The passionate desire to prove his power by indiscriminate slaughter, the terrible joy he had known in surveying piles of corpses and the devastation of war, suddenly departed and he remained chilled and impassive. His power had been proved. Death, his councillor, had withdrawn, and though he still held in his right hand the fiery sword, its glow had faded.

His spirit, as always, reacted on the spirit of the army, and he was aware of discontent among his troops. Strange and stranger rumours circulated in the camp.

"What is the plan for the future? Are we to stay here till we die? There is no more loot to be had in this country. We have been used and now our bones will rot far from the homeland. Heaven does not will it thus. There are signs that we should return and that speedily."

What were the signs? Chingiz summoned his Chinese minister, the venerable Yeliu Chutsai, who accompanied him everywhere, and questioned him as to the portents.

"Know, oh! Khan, that there has appeared to the outposts and guards, at night, a creature resembling a deer, but of a mystical nature. For it comes in a shaft of light and its head is like that of a horse, and it has one horn on its forehead and its body is covered with green hair."

The minister's tone was so serious that Chingiz did not smile. Instead his expression was troubled, as he answered:

"Are we to credit the reports of the ignorant, oh! my father?"

"The eyes of the simple are sometimes open to truth

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST.

which is hidden from the wise," replied Yeliu Chutsai. "I have not seen this creature myself, but I know it to be Kotwan, who has the power of human speech and can make itself understood in every language. It spoke to the guards saying: 'It is time for your master to return to his own land!'"

"That is the will of the army. Are we to take it as Heaven's will also?"

"Heaven speaks through the people and by the mouth of Kotwan. Oh! Khan, Kotwan is a creature of peace. Heaven, the abode of peace, desires that bloodshed shall cease for the present. War has continued long enough. Show mercy and moderation and Heaven will be satisfied."

Whether by his own good sense or by this advice, Chingiz was convinced. He gave orders for a general retreat. But before this could be carried out, the problem of superfluous numbers on the arduous journey had to be settled.

There was an enormous horde of prisoners with the army, men who had been captured and spared from death because they could be utilised as labour battalions. If they were left behind, they would be a menace on the rear. If they were to be taken, they amounted to so many useless mouths. Despite Heaven's warning against further bloodshed, the only solution was that they should die, not slowly by starvation, but swiftly and mercifully by the sword. First, however, they were all forced to hull an immense store of grain, for the provisioning of the Mongol army, and, when this work was done the slaughter was accomplished darkly and secretly within the tents.

The Mongols returned northwards by the way they had come, through Peshawur, and over the mountains and by the gorge of Bamian. And here the Silent Ones seemed to speak to Chingiz again, saying: "Pass, mortal, to your

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

destiny. . . . For all is illusion—illusion, excepting only the Spirit and we who remain. . . .”

The summer was spent in the district of Bakalan.

In the autumn, they came once more to the ruins of Balkh, on the Samarcand road, and in the battered silver setting, from which that pale jewel had been torn, they found and slew a few poor fugitives.

Crossing the Oxus, then, they reached all that was left of Bokhara the beautiful. Some of her mosques still stood and were still frequented by the learned, who had had time to taste the bitterness of truth.

Chingiz came now to the place, in gentler mood, and he summoned the theologians to explain to him the faith. They obeyed trembling and were surprised by his tolerance.

“This is the foundation and cornerstone of religion, oh ! Very Mighty, that there is no God but One.”

“That I know to be true. He whom you call God or Allah is the Mightiest and I am his servant.”

“Mahommed was His prophet and the mosque is the house of prayer.”

“There have been many prophets,” said Chingiz, “of whom Mahommed may have been one of the wisest. But the whole world is the house of God, and prayers reach Him wheresoever they rise. Can the Mightiest require His creatures to enclose themselves within walls, before they petition or praise Him ? Nay, for His canopy is the firmament and His carpet is the earth, and what are men that they should approach him in any different manner to the birds of the air and the flowers of the field ?”

“Are not these inferior to man, oh ! Khan ?”

“I have not found them so,” said Chingiz. “And, in the eyes of God, I think all true worshippers are equal.”

On leaving the fertile valley of the Sogd, Chingiz gave orders that all the female prisoners who had been left in

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Turkestan, among whom were Turkan Khatoun, the Queen Mother, and the wives and daughters of Shah Mahomed, should be lined on the roadway and from the summit of a hill take a last look at their native land.

So, between a double row of women and to the sound of wailing voices, he left the country, which his arms had converted into a desert.

Did he think that their tears might water it again and wash away his offence?

It was in a strange and softened temper that Chingiz returned from his greatest conquest.

The hardships of the homeward journey were enlivened with sport. Jagatai and Ogotai rode out to shoot wild swans and hunt antelope and sent in to their father fifteen camel loads of the great white birds and much venison. On the banks of the Imil river, Chingiz was met by two of his grandsons, Kubilai, a boy of eleven, and Hulagu, aged nine. They were respectively the second and third sons of Tului, that fierce wolf, who was the favourite of Chingiz. Both boys had killed their first game and came to do homage to their grandfather. He received them gravely, and with ceremony conducted the customary Mongol baptism of the chase, himself pricking their small fingers and mixing their blood with food and wine, of which they partook. Then he drew them both within his arms and looked long and attentively, first into the calm young face of Kubilai, then into the shining eyes of Hulagu.

"You," he said to the latter, "shall be a great warrior and your name shall be long remembered as a conqueror. As a bright sword, shall you shine in the hand of your elder brother Mangu, who will succeed your cousin Kuyuk, the son of Ogotai. Be just and tolerant, that your splendour may never be dimmed."

Then to Kubilai he said, "Which is better, little man,

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

to rule a great empire or to be the friend of strangers from afar ? ”

“ To rule an empire,” answered Kubilai, “ a man must first rule his own heart. So in learning wise government, he will also learn those manners that will make him the friend of strangers, whereby his knowledge will be increased.”

Chingiz was delighted. “ You speak well, Kubilai. The future is in your words. You will reign, surely you will reign over a great dominion, when my bones and the bones of Ogotai and the bones of Kuyuk and of Mangu are dust. And I have dreamed a dream, Kubilai, of you and three birds, foreign birds of black plumage whose name I know not. Only this I know, that one of these birds, and that the youngest, shall bring you great renown.”

“ I shall remember,” said Kubilai gravely, “ and when I see these three birds, I will do them honour.”¹

Before Chingiz reached his homeland, in February, 1225, he was joined by Chebé Noyan and Subotai, returning from their western conquests. When they had finished hunting Shah Mahommed, they had raided Azerbaidjana and had taken, among other towns, Ecbatana, the capital of the ancient Medes ; they had wintered on the shores of the Caspian and had then advanced into Georgia, crossed the Caucasus and fought the Polovtsi, as has already been told. Great was their renown from their subsequent defeat of the Russians on the Dnieper. Great was the booty of furs and honey and wax and fossil ivory, which they had gleaned from the land of the Middle Volga.

Chebé had indeed proved himself one of the first generals and the most notable warriors of his time. He and Subotai

¹ The birds of Chingiz' vision must have been the three Polos, who came to Kubilai's court and whose escutcheon, bearing the sign of three jackdaws, signified their name.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

went back with Chingiz now to the homeland, from which the great Khan had been absent for seven years.

With them also went Ogotai and Tului and the Idikut of the Uigurs, whose superior culture had made him an important ally, and to whose influence no doubt may be ascribed the favour shown to many Persian artisans. The craft of these skilled workmen, who accompanied the Mongol army in great numbers, mingled with that of the Chinese to produce later that far-reaching revival in literature and manufacture that has previously been indicated.

Chingiz appointed his son Jagatai and Batu, the son of Juchi the bastard, to govern his western conquests. Juchi had died, since his separation from the family, but had left by various wives about forty children, of whom Batu, as the chief of the Golden Horde of Kipchaks, became the most famous.

Thus the first-born of Bortai and his heirs were not the least considerable of her offspring, a fact which throws a curious sidelight on heredity. For, though it is remarkable that great men seldom have great sons, it is noteworthy that genius is often inherited from the mother. Bortai always remained the first and best beloved wife of Chingiz, among a multitude of other women. All her children gained renown even to succeeding generations, but of the other children of Chingiz we hear nothing. It was not then through him that the divine spark was perpetuated, but through her whose name and influence are almost forgotten.

We may imagine with what joy these two met again after long absence !

Bortai, the well beloved, Bortai the playfellow of his childhood, the comrade of his youth, the wife of his heart, she was for Chingiz the inspiring spirit of the homeland, and in her arms at last he could rest from his labours.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Not for long, however, could he enjoy such repose.

When he had left the Northern Chinese Empire of the Kins in 1216, the people, profiting by his general Samuka's failure to force the barrier of the Tung Kwan gorge,¹ had re-occupied nearly all the conquered land and had re-fortified nearly every city, with the exception of ruined Chung Tu.

Mukuli, the next Mongol general, had re-invaded China the following year and had succeeded, in his first and second expeditions, in subduing all but one province, that of Honan, which lies south of the Yellow River.

But in 1223, Mukuli had died and the Sung Empire in the south had made common cause with the Kins in the north against the hated Mongols, enlisting also the help of Tangut, that perpetually rebellious subject. Then Utubu, the Kin Emperor, had sent an embassy to Chingiz in the west, offering to yield all places north of the Yellow River and to be a younger brother.

Chingiz made this temperate answer to the envoy :

" It is only in consideration of the great distance you have come that I can be indulgent. The land north of the Yellow River is already in my possession, but there are still some cities west of Tung Kwan which have not surrendered. Tell your sovereign to surrender these cities, and then he may reign south of the Yellow River with the title of Wang " (or Prince of Honan).

On this, the resistance of China had become more pronounced and the unerring judgment of the conqueror soon fixed the responsibility. Not on the wretched Utubu, who had deserted his capital and brought misery on his subjects, not on the Emperor of the ancient Sung dynasty, weakened by generations of vassalage, but on that comparatively small Kingdom of Tangut, which had always been a thorn in his side, whose people had all the culture and all the courage

¹ See Chap. XIII.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

of the Chinese and none of their defects, and whose king Li-ti was called by the Mongols, Shidurgo, meaning honest and straightforward.

Li-ti had lately succeeded his father as King of Tangut, and had already proved himself recalcitrant, by failing to send his young son as a hostage to the Mongol court. His wife, Kurbeldjin Goa, was famed as a beauty and was suspected of being the real power behind the throne.

Chingiz appreciated by this time the value of a woman's influence.

The time had come to strike forcibly at Tangut once for all, to reduce it finally and to exterminate its rulers, for in that country there was a living spark which might yet inflame a united Chinese Empire. This spark was undoubtedly religious in nature, for the country of Tangut was with Tibet (which lay on its south-western frontier) the homeland of Northern Buddhism. Whereas the faith of Tibet was, however, debased, that of Tangut, touched with Chinese reason, remained pure, and Tangut was considered sacred and mysterious to a greater degree even than the border country. Her people held themselves aloof and were physiologically separate and distinct from other nations, of finer countenance than the Mongolian race and rather resembling gypsies. Their skin was pale, their hair and eyes dark, and they had not the characteristic slanting eyelid or the markedly prominent cheek bones of their neighbours. Their oval faces were not flat, their noses were straight and their lips full. Their skulls were well shaped and their teeth were remarkably fine and white.

In the healthy climate of their mountainous country, where the wild yak bred and the golden pheasant flew, they enjoyed an ideal culture almost superior to that of the Chinese. They had the same customs and the same respect for learning, only to a nobler and gentler degree. The

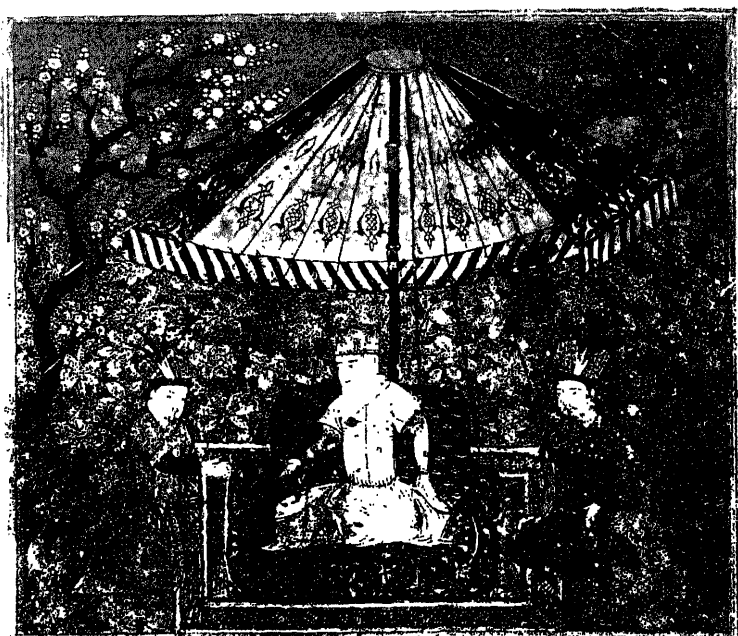
SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

rigid etiquette and the cold cruelties of the north, whether of the Iron or the Goldenst Dynasties, were here softened, simplified and purified. Their manners were naturally modest and dignified and they knew not the meaning of fear.

Such was Tangut, vanished kingdom of romance and beauty, the memory of which lingers like a happy dream.

As a picture painted on silk in delicate colours of rose and amethyst and amber, it may be seen on a page of history in surprising contrast to the lurid scenes of violent conflict. Surely it was a fairy realm, which no rude mortal invasion could for ever destroy. Though it might be wiped from the map of Asia, though its pleasant people might perish and its civilisation flee away, its gleaming palaces may still be seen in opal tinted clouds, its peculiar and lovely spirit is in the breath of summer winds and the ripple of sunlit waves.

Alas ! land of Hsia, incomparable Tangut, whose name is a sigh ! Only through that name of yours can we know the measure of your ancient charm, which was beyond mere pleasure and too subtle for tears.



دولتمندان ایشان هر دو را و داع کرده باز گردانید و با سر مملکت را پس فرستاد و خوشین باشکوهی بجانب سراسر ساز

CHINGHIZ KHAN RECEIVING A REPORT FROM HIS OFFICERS.

From a Photograph by M. Paul Lemare, Paris.

CHAPTER XXI.

Now Li-ti Shidurgo, King of Tangut, and Kurbeldjin Goa, his Queen, had one son only, the Prince Li Hsien, who combined in his person every quality by which a man may be revered and a child beloved. He was courageous and upright, beautiful as a heavenly spirit, devoted to his parents and to the interests of the people. His father knew that he could leave his kingdom in no better hands, and this was saying much, for Li-ti loved his country as he loved his son.

The land was for him a sacred and inviolable shrine. To it he gave his worship and his prayers. With the gods who inhabited its valleys, and its mountain caverns, he was in constant communion. And, though the barbarian might dare to set foot within its holy precincts, he knew himself strong enough to resist their abominable presence for ever.

In their summer residence at the foot of the Alashan mountains, the young Prince Li Hsien wandered at ease on the high terraces of a magnificent castle. The walls were of marble, studded with large iron nails, softened with verdigris. The curved roof was of brightest yellow porcelain tiles, which shone like the golden flowers of the wild rhubarb in the valley. The scene was one of enchantment and perfect peace. Behind the palace towered the snow-covered range beneath an azure sky. In the lower pastures, grew spreading trees, where flocks of sheep and goats found a pleasant shade. Rose coloured oleanders and white acanthus bloomed in antique bowls of bronze on the white

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

terraces. In arbours of jessamine and almond blossom, fair maidens, in opal tinted robes, disported themselves with garlands and from a temple, set like a jewel in the clearing of a grove of cypress trees, rose the soft chanting of priests and the perfume of incense.

As he paced the terrace, Li Hsien surveyed the realm that would one day be his own, without ambition, but with that deep joy which is so near to melancholy. He wore a surcoat of red silk over a long camlet of pure white wool, and large rings of green jadeite adorned his ears. He reflected that the highest attainment can only be through the most profound loss. How should he ever enjoy kingship, when the path thereto should lead past the grave of his revered father?

"Only through sorrow can we be wise," thought young Li Hsien. "To rule is not to be happy, but through service and through self-sacrifice contentment may be reached."

At this point, when his soul was elevated to the calm ecstasy of his Buddhist faith, a strange and terrible sound suddenly disturbed him. It was the sound of a dog howling as though in torment.

Li Hsien's face blanched. He stood still and listened. The dreadful noise continued—a long drawn despairing wail, cutting like a sword across the scented air and the sounds of peace.

"It cannot be," said Li Hsien, putting his hands over his ears. "This prophecy cannot be true! War! How should war come again to our dear land!"

And this he said, against his inborn conviction, for well he knew that the voice he had heard was that of the King's own dog, a strange creature that had the power of prophecy. Everyone was aware that, in times of peace and plenty, this dog, who enjoyed every comfort, barked like any of his

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

fellows. But, when war was imminent and the State was threatened, the dog howled. And already his instinct had been proved true four times, for on four separate occasions had he given warning before the invasion of Tangut by the Mongols.

Li Hsien clapped his hands and a servant came running to his summons.

"Go quickly, and see whether the King's brown dog, the brown dog with the black muzzle, wants for anything. If he is chained, set him free. If he desires food or water, serve him."

No sooner had the servant gone in one direction to seek the dog, than the dog himself appeared on the terrace from the opposite direction, running towards Li Hsien and snuffing the ground. Li Hsien called to him and he came with drooping tail and every sign of distress and crouched miserably at the feet of the Prince. Li Hsien patted his head and consoled him with gentle words, "What ails you, foolish one? We are at peace. There is no menace in the air. What dream troubled you?"

The dog lifted his head and gazed at Li Hsien with tragic eyes. Then he sprang up, his head went further back—again his howl broke forth. Li Hsien dropped on his knees beside the dog and put both arms around his neck.

"Peace! Peace!" he cried in a broken voice. "Ah! friend, you are mistaken. Speak in your own words, and tell me so. Have you forgotten how to bark? That is it—that indeed must be it. Old age has overtaken you. You desire to bark, is it not so, and can manage nothing but howls? There are white hairs in your muzzle, friend. I understand. I respect your infirmities, and they shall not deceive me. Peace! Be still! See, no harm shall come to you or to this land while I, the son of your master, live."

The dog whimpered, and lay down resting his nose against

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

the knees of Li Hsien. There they crouched on the terrace, man and dog together. The young Prince suddenly laid his white face on the animal's brown head and wept.

Chingiz Khan made preparations to invade Tangut for the fifth time, and to reduce it finally to subjection with an army of only one hundred and eighty thousand men ; sixty thousand were under his son Jagatai, thirty thousand under Chebé Noyan and Subotai and the remainder, comprising a hord of Kwaresmians, Indians and Kipchaks, were under his own leadership. Ogotai was to remain with the reserves and Tului stayed to rule the homeland.

When this news confirmed the prophetic instinct of Li-ti's brown dog, the King of Tangut collected to resist the enemy a large and well accoutred army of Chinese, Turks and Tibetans, numbering in all five hundred thousand. To his frontier he also sent out some of his most brave and faithful men as spies. In the spring of 1225, the Mongol host approached, by slow stages, first across the high steppes and then across the sands of the Gobi.

When they reached the marshy sources of the rivers Oughin and Tingol, they paused to divert themselves with a great hunt and Chingiz, probably better informed even than Li-ti, began to take precautions against surprise.

He announced, strangely enough, one day that in that district a certain blue wolf and a certain white doe ran wild and that he desired them to be captured and brought alive to him. These were surely the mythical or actual founders of his race. His words no doubt signified, that any inhabitants of the Tibetan frontier who were akin to the Mongols or in sympathy with their aims should be treated with respect and invited to his alliance.

It is said, at all events, that the blue wolf and the white doe were brought to him, from which it may be deduced

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

that some tribes of Tibetans did desert their own people and join him.

On another day he said, "There is also hereabouts a dark visaged man on a grey horse. See that he is found and brought hither for I desire to question him."

A man, answering this description and evidently one of Li-ti's spies, was captured and dragged into the presence of Chingiz.

"Who are you and what do you know?" inquired the great Khan.

Even in his desperate plight the spy presented a formidable figure. He was of immense stature and his face was burned almost black by the sun. He showed no sign of fear, but met the eyes of the conqueror boldly.

"I am a friend of Shidurgo and he has sent me for information. My name is Katuraktchi Kara Budung, and in all Tangut there is none superior to me."

"If that be so, how did you fall into the hands of my men?"

"I was taken unawares while I lay down to rest and while my grey horse, a racer whom no creature with feet can catch, was tethered by his four feet. Kill me if you will, oh! Khan, but take my grey horse for your own, for there is no better steed in this kingdom."

"You must first reveal the disposition of Shidurgo's army," said Chingiz.

"That I can never do," answered the man. "I have spoken; Shidurgo is my friend."

"You said that in all Tangut there is none superior to you. Do you then serve Shidurgo as an equal or is he indeed your master?"

"No man is the equal of Shidurgo. He is a Kubilghan, that is to say, a regeneration of the Buddha. In him is the divine spirit and he is worthy of all reverence. The

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

secrets of the universe are not hidden from him and through his magic power he can take many forms."

"Supposing that I also, by the favour of Heaven, had this power," said Chingiz, "how could Shidurgo defeat me?"

"In the morning he would creep on you secretly, oh! Khan, like a serpent."

"Then would I pounce on him from above like a strong eagle."

"Before you could seize him, he would change to a tawny striped tiger and crush you with his weight."

"I would take the strength of a lion and he would be powerless against the King of Beasts."

"Nay," answered the man gravely. "Shidurgo would rob you of your power in that moment. For you would see him suddenly in the form of a little child, and something greater than brute strength would withhold you."

"True," said Chingiz, "no mortal man could injure Shidurgo, if he appeared thus."

And to show his admiration of courage, he spared the spy's life and dismissed him.

The Mongol army marched through the Momo Shan mountains, on their way from the desert to the capital city of Chung-sing,¹ north-west of the great bend in the Hoang ho or Yellow River.

As they debouched on to the rich and park like plains below, Chingiz said reflectively, "This would be a capital rallying ground for a broken people and a capital camping ground for a people united and peaceable. Never have I seen more beautiful grazing for roe bucks. Never have I imagined a more charming resting place for an old man."

His age at this time was sixty-three. He had hardly passed the prime of his manhood, but it is probable that he

¹ Now Ning-hsia.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

was weary of conflict and began to feel the strain of long campaigns. His ambition was satisfied, but his genius demanded that his life work should be completed. How could he rest when, amid the ruin of Empires, one small kingdom dared still to defy him? He knew that he could break the army of Tangut by superior strategy and tactics. Yet in these lush and radiant pastures it might be rallied again and again. Shidurgo's subjects were a peaceable and united people. Why should they continue resistance? Why should they not rest content as his vassals, and enjoy the plenty that he would so willingly allow them?

War after all was so futile and bloodshed so bitter. The aim of conflict was security and the end of all men rest.

The thoughts of Chingiz were troubled as he weighed the complex problem of human existence against the simple law of nature. On man's side the strong desire for ease, the urge towards the ideal, the necessity for civilisation; none of which could be won without effort, strength and hardship. If man ceased for a moment in the struggle, his ease became sloth, his ideal was falsified, his civilisation rotted.

On Nature's side, perpetual warfare hidden by a semblance of order, far beyond human achievement. The animal, the vegetable, the mineral kingdoms fought furiously and unceasingly for bare existence, and this fighting attained the most perfect symmetry of form, the uttermost balance of power, the most complete equilibrium of their several states that could be imagined. The reason of their success must be that they fought unconsciously, directed by a higher power, the supreme constructor, the Mightiest. While Man, seeking to usurp this authority, fought consciously, with the eye of an amateur fixed on the desired end. As an artist man, in comparison with Nature, failed lamentably. Only as a warrior fulfilling his primitive vocation, he might dare to compete with the wild.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

The people of Tangut, for all their civilisation, surely appreciated this law. They were prepared to fight to the death for the survival of their independence, and Chingiz could only hope to impose himself on them by superior ferocity and superior cunning, the very attributes of Nature. As he had seen so much of human culture, however, it is possible that he had, in this last campaign, moments when he doubted his own prowess as a man. He thought of the mystical character in which Shidurgo, the straight-forward, appeared to his subjects. He looked for omens of his own possible failure and found them.

One morning in the camp an owl sounded a plaintive note from a tree. It irritated and depressed Chingiz who heard it, and he called for his brother Juchi Kassar, that strong archer, to bring his bow and arrows and shoot the bird.

In the failing light, Juchi-Kassar grumbling took aim. The quarrel of early days between these two had never been quite healed, yet Kassar was as ready now to shoot at the Khan's bidding, as he had been when he killed Baiktar.

A small body, pierced by the shaft, fell from the tree. When it was picked up, they found it was not that of the offending owl, which had doubtless flown away, but a magpie. It was an unhappy augury. Juchi Kassar deplored his luck and Chingiz forgot the warning of Hoelun and fell into a rage. He had Kassar chained and watched by four men, and Kassar took revenge by spreading a malicious report that the Khan grew jealous in his old age, that the real cause of this punishment was that a slave had slandered Kassar, saying Kassar had looked with favour on one of the Khan's wives !

So human to the end was the super-man !

So human was sixty-year-old Juchi Kassar, seeking to the last a little notoriety, furious at his failing prowess as a great archer.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

They forgave each other again, no doubt before long, but this is the last we hear of Juchi Kassar.

The fair city of Chung-sing, now occupied by the King and his court, was invested by the Mongols and, in the early Spring of 1226, Chingiz went on by good roads and took Etzina, Suchau and Kanchau. Then he invaded the province of Liang chau and ruined the whole district. The nine fords of the Hoang ho subsequently fell to his arms and he over-ran the entire country to the Yellow River.

Everywhere the armies of Tangut were defeated. Everywhere trampled pastures, broken walls and burning buildings testified to the visitation of the Mongols. The temples were deserted. The gods were cast down. From the ravaged cities, any inhabitants who could escape massacre fled to the mountains to exist in caves and holes like wild beasts. To this day, the region is haunted by their sad ghosts.

Shidurgo saw his sacred land violated and abandoned hope.

"This fate can only be the result of my rule," he said. "The reins of government should be in stronger hands. Oh ! Hsia, beloved country, never can I stand in the way of your salvation, never can I survive your torment. I leave you to the care of my son, the noble Li Hsien, and his mother Kurbeldjin Goa, who has no equal on earth."

So saying and prostrated with grief, his heart broke and he died.

Li Hsien rallied a large final army against the conqueror on the banks of the Yellow River.

They paraded in their thousands, a splendid host of horse and foot, the flower of Tangut, young, brave and radiant. From the sack of Liang chau Fu, the dark Mongol horde, drunk with blood and terrible as a storm, came to meet them.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

And the banners of Tangut fell to the wind of their onslaught and the flower of Tangut perished in that day.

The battle lasted long and, at the end, the Mongols counted the number of the enemy killed. For every thousand dead they took one corpse and placed it on its head in an elevated position. On three surrounding hilltops, there were three such bodies now dishonoured.

Within the walls of Chung-sing, the young king Li Hsien heard of this defeat, but would not yet despair.

"We can die," he said, "but we will never submit. To leave this earthly existence with honour is to enjoy peace. To yield to force and acknowledge the suzerainty of Chingiz would be the extermination of our spirit."

And all his councillors approved his determination and his courage.

Chingiz now left troops to watch the Tangut capital, and encamped for some little time at Yenchau, where he received the homage of a certain Prince of Liao-tang, who had not Li Hsien's high idea of duty. He treated this prince with the utmost honour, confirming his rulership and loading him with presents in the lucky number of nines.

Li Hsien, however, could not be tempted from his purpose by the news of such consideration.

Then Chingiz continued to carry war through the country. City after city was taken and ruined. There was no longer an army to stand against him. There were only guerilla bands of desperate men, who still fought for every vantage point they could hold for a week, a day or an hour, and they were hunted till they could only resist for moments.

Tangut was reduced to a wilderness and deserted by every ally. The Sung Emperor held aloof. The Kin Emperor, with an offer of submission, sent to Chingiz a dish filled with priceless pearls, which were duly distributed among the Mongols.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Yet still the young king Li Hsien, sharing the sufferings of his people in the beleaguered city of Chung-sing, refused to bow the head. Only in an inner chamber of his palace he prayed :

“Oh ! gentle Death, come soon to our relief. Oh ! fair and honourable sleep that knows no waking, how gladly would I go to thee, but that I must not leave my people.”

With his own hands he distributed all the riches of the palace among the poor. They knew no privation which was not also his. The beggars in the streets of the city prostrated themselves as he passed and kissed the dust of his footsteps. Women lifted the starving children from their dry breasts that he might bless them.

And beside him always went Kurbeldjin Goa, the Queen, who had no equal upon earth. Then at last one day his councillors came to the King saying, “Hsia is lost and Chung-sing must fall. The time is come for surrender, since thereby Chingiz Khan has promised mercy. Our purpose is undermined by grief. The eyes of the steadfast can see no longer for tears. The fields that should whiten to harvest are bleached with the bones of the dead. Oh ! father and friend of your people, save them by yielding your person.”

And Li Hsien turned to Kurbeldjin Goa, the Queen, and said, “Beloved, is this my duty ?”

Kurbeldjin Goa, the Queen, answered—“Beloved, yes.”

At about this time, Chingiz dreamed a dream, which was partly perhaps the unconscious memory of his interview with Shidurgo's spy, the dark visaged man with the grey horse, and partly a foreshadowing of future events.¹

¹This story is given as fact by Ssanang Setsen, the Mongol historian, but as its meaning is probably symbolical, it has seemed better here to transcribe it as a dream and to draw attention to its underlying mystic significance.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

The meaning of the references to various forms to be taken by the King of Tangut and himself had been made clear, during the course of the campaign. First the large army of Li-ti had lain in wait for him like a serpent and he had pounced on it from the mountains like a strong eagle. Then Li-ti had fought like a tiger and had been defeated by Chingiz the lion, King of beasts. Finally Li-ti, by dying had become as a little child, immune to trouble, unconquerable by reason of his cessation from strife.

Chingiz the man was powerless against the passivity of death. There remained the son of Li-ti and his kingdom, actual and negotiable facts, sustained by an immortal spirit. Even should they be physically annihilated, spiritually they must continue like Shidurgo himself.

Now, in his dream, Chingiz saw Shidurgo as the great serpent and himself as the eagle. Shidurgo changed into a tiger and Chingiz became a lion. Shidurgo was thereupon a smiling child and for a moment Chingiz was possessed by frightful doubt . . . Next moment he called on Heaven and Heaven, whose son he believed himself to be, inspired him. The only form in which he could overcome Shidurgo's last incarnation was the form of pure reason. He saw himself suddenly permitted to abandon earthly form and to appear as a heavenly spirit, benign and radiant. Shidurgo was then at his mercy, the spirit of Tangut was in his hands—a Tangut alive and independent, not his vassal but his most faithful ally, a country whose civilisation would have laid the foundations of an empire more lasting than anything he could construct alone. But see the sequel of the dream as it continued.

Having gained supremacy over Shidurgo, Chingiz abandoned the heavenly form of reason and resumed the earthly form of a conqueror. He held Shidurgo bound. And Shidurgo said to him, "If you kill me it will be fatal to your children."

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

The Yuen dynasty of the Mongols in China, whose empire was built on violence, lasted only one hundred years.

Chingiz struck with his sword, but the blow did no harm.

Then said Shirdurgo, "There is only one weapon in the world that can kill me, a triple dagger made of magnet, which is now hidden between my first and second boot soles."

And he drew forth the blade and gave it to Chingiz. "Kill me ! If milk comes from the wound, it will fortoken ill to you. If blood flows, it will fortoken ill to your posterity."

Greatly daring, Chingiz stabbed Shidurgo in the neck and the wound was red.

But, before he died, Shidurgo leaned on his elbow and said, "Kurbeldjin Goa, the Queen, who has no equal upon earth, will come to you. Before taking her, look to her previous life very carefully and see whether she be mortal or no."

And on this Chingiz awoke and wondered about Kurbeldjin Goa the Queen.

CHAPTER XXII

LI HSIEN sent an offer of submission to Chingiz.

"Oh, Khan, if I surrender to you my person alive, and all the wealth that remains to me, will you cease from troubling my people and leave the land of Hsia that it may recover from its grief? If you will not show mercy to Hsia, I will share death with my country very gladly."

Chingiz promised to receive the young king with honour and, on his appearance in the Mongol camp, to return at once to the homeland.

So the gates of Chung-sing were opened and the Mongols who had invested the city poured in, but, acting under stern orders from Chingiz, forbore from any violence, and instead distributed food among the starving inhabitants.

And Li Hsien came forth from his palace, riding in a golden chair, hung with curtains of yellow silk and attended by his faithful guards, who piled their arms at the feet of the Mongol commander as they passed. They retained their body armour and their iron helmets, edged with red silk fringe and their faces were like those of dead men, pale and still.

They were followed by horses, laden with all the wealth it had been possible to collect in the city, jewels of rare value that had been distributed in exchange for bread, caskets of gold and silver, vases of porcelain and jade, bales of silk and robes of the finest wool. Every house in Chung-sing had yielded up the riches bestowed by the King, in exchange for the inestimable gift of peace.

They sang the praise of Li Hsien as he passed to his doom.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

They called blessings on his name as he went, a voluntary sacrifice for their salvation. Life was still sweet to them. He, by foregoing death in their midst and yielding himself to a fate more bitter, appeared to them like a god.

By the side of Li Hsien went Kurbeldjin Goa, the Queen, who never left him.

And they took the road to the camp of Chingiz, which lay at three days distance. They were permitted to go alone, unattended by the Mongols, for the King had stipulated that he should be free, until he had delivered his person alive to Chingiz, and Chingiz, to show honour to the King, had accepted his word.

On the first day then, the Captain of the Guard drew rein by Li Hsien's chair and said to him, "Lord, permit that we rescue you. We are your faithful servants and no dishonour shall be yours through this deed. For we are many and we will overpower you and carry you into the mountains and hold you, till it shall be safe to show you again to your people."

Li Hsien looked to Kurbeldjin Goa and said, "Beloved, may this be?"

Kurbeldjin Goa, answered, "Beloved, no!"

"Ride on," said Li Hsien, "My word is given to Chingiz."

On the second day, the Captain of the Guard again drew rein and said to the King, "Lord, here is a dagger which I concealed in my boot sole. Take your own life, for we know well that this release would for you be happier than captivity with the barbarian."

Li Hsien turned his eyes from the dagger and looked to Kurbeldjin Goa.

"Beloved, grant that this may be."

But again Kurbeldjin Goa answered, "Beloved, no!"

"Keep your dagger and ride on," said Li Hsien to the Captain of the Guard. "My word is given to Chingiz."

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

On the third day, before the dawn broke, and while yet they were at some distance from the Mongol camp, the Captain of the Guard halted his men and the chair carriers and came to the King's side and drew open the yellow curtains.

"Lord, we cannot look on the sacrifice of your sacred person. For the sake of the love we bear you, pardon our offence."

And with the dagger he struck Li Hsien in the neck so that the King died quickly. But while yet Li Hsien breathed, he turned to Kurbeldjin Goa.

"Beloved, is it permitted that I depart in peace?"

Kurbeldjin Goa answered—"Beloved, yes."

So passed Li Hsien, King of Tangut, supported to the end by Courage.

But Kurbeldjin Goa, the Queen, went on.

With her went all the wealth of Chung-sing to be delivered up to Chingiz. With her also went news of the murder of Li Hsien on the way.

Only the Captain of the Guard, who had loved the King so well, did not go with her, for his word had not been given to Chingiz and after he had killed the King he had killed himself.

A troop of Mongol horsemen rode out to escort the procession into the camp.

And when Kurbeldjin Goa descended, all men marvelled at her beauty. It was a beauty of universal appeal. In it was the song of youth and the dignity of age. It was compounded of glorious dreams and tender memories, of mirth that lightens darkness and love that quenches tears. It was bright like a naked sword, and perfumed like a flower. The ecstasy of life was in it, the sense of endeavour, comradeship, duty and tradition. She was the desire of men.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

She was that for which men look in their sons ; she was that which women learn in their supreme hour. All great adventures, all noble deeds, all aspiring thoughts, the control of the body, the cleanliness of the soul, Faith, Hope and Love, these were the attributes of her beauty.

She was old—older than tattered banners hanging under dim roofs, older than far off forgotten legends, older than time.

Yet she was eternally young, with the youth of childhood and of morning.

And the experience of her age was less terrible and less strong than the innocence of her youth. For in her there seemed to be two persons, the one which had been tried and had sometimes failed and yet had survived, and the other which had never been tried and yet was assured by an inner consciousness of its power.

And men marvelled at the old person and did reverence to it, but so wonderful was the young person that they could hardly bear to look upon it, as shall now be shown.

Kurbeldjin Goa said, " Oh, men, why do you marvel at me ? You have seen this face of mine in your midst before. Lo, I am grimed with dust from my journey. Before I go to Chingiz Khan, I will bathe in the river and my full beauty shall then be revealed."

She went down to the river followed by a great crowd of people. As she stood on the bank, a white bird hovered over her, and she caught it in her hands.

Then she spoke to the bird saying, " Fly away and tell my father Schang dsa Wang, of the tribe of U, that, when my work is done, I shall put off this form of mine in the waters of the river. Let him search for my body up the stream and not down."

And when the bird had flown away, she said, " I am ashamed of bathing before all this company. Let them begone. I will bathe alone."

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

So they went and left her.

When she returned from the river, it was true that she was ten times more beautiful than she had been before.

She wore a robe of peach coloured silk, delicate as the clouds of sunrise, embroidered with bats and fantastic flowers and the green waves of the sea. Her long black hair hung in many plaits, intertwined with pearls and ribbons, and her head was surmounted by a coronet of gold and kingfisher feather enamel, wrought into the form of a phoenix. Jewels of jade and coral and amber adorned her ears and her bosom, and on her little feet were socks of silk, encrusted with precious stones. Her dark eyes were widely opened and her full scarlet lips were curved in a smile. She was like the first flower of springtime, or like a young warrior who meets death not with resignation but with disdain.

And she said, "I am now ready. Take me to Chingiz Khan."

Chingiz held his court in the open, for the season was summer. He sat on a square raised throne of blackwood, that was decorated in silver with a design of dragons. Behind the throne, ornamental flowering trees with red blossoms had been planted and trained to form a bower, and before him, on either side, a double row of the same trees sprang from the velvet turf, leaving a broad aisle for approach. His attendants, wearing the habits of ceremony and peace, busied themselves in preparing a feast, while musicians discoursed tender and plaintive strains.

The conqueror had put off the panoply of war and was dressed in a Chinese robe, stiff with gold and silver thread. On his head he wore the Mongol Botta, decorated magnificently with peacock's feathers and white egrets. In his right hand he held a drinking cup of rock crystal wonderfully carved, and on the thumb of his left hand he wore the

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

gold signet ring of state. He dominated that assembly, as a ruler, in the way he had always dominated men as a personality. His figure was large and thick set, his demeanour stern and calm. He looked straight before him and his expression was totally impassive.

Yet there was about his still and regal pose the suggestion of waiting, a sense of suspense, as though he expected some new and amazing manifestation of power, equal to his own. And when he had received the news of Li Hsien's death and Kurbeldjin Goa appeared before him in all her glory, his blue eyes suddenly lightened and a look of wonder crept into his face.

She did not bow the head or the knee. She approached to the lowest step of the throne and stood there alone and met his gaze.

A shaft of sunlight lit her figure, so that she seemed to be surrounded by an unearthly radiance. No word passed between them.

The only sound was the flute like note of a bird from one of the flowering trees. The musicians, the courtiers, the attendants were transfixed to immobility by the strangeness of the scene.

But, after several moments, Chingiz rose to his feet. And still with his eyes on Kurbeldjin Goa, he descended slowly from the throne, like one moving in a dream. He took her hand and led her majestically over the velvet turf, along the aisle between the flowering trees. And so they went together towards his great tent, the pavilion of white silk, adorned with crimson and gold, which was set at a little distance from the place of audience.

Here armed men stood on guard, and here his favourite horse, a black stallion richly caparisoned, stood ready for his mounting. He dismissed them all, and entered into the tent with Kurbeldjin Goa and closed the door flap.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

They were alone.

He set her upon the couch of ermine, the place of honour reserved for the Master, in the North part of the tent with her face towards the South. And he took from off his thumb the gold signet ring of state and put it on her thumb. Then, standing on the west side, which is the place of men, he prostrated himself before her.

Kurbeldjin Goa said, "Rise, Chingiz, for you have proved yourself more than mortal. I who have inspired you so often, know your nature."

He answered kneeling, "You are what I have sought all my life. You are the desire of men. Some called you by the name of Yelui Tashi and some by the name of Wang Khan of the Keraites. I looked for you in Kushluk and did not find you. I thought to discover you in Jelal ed din Mankobirti and you eluded me. Oh! royal and holy one, tell me I beseech you, why appear you now at last in the form of a woman?"

She said, "Look in your own heart, Chingiz, for the answer. Were not you, Very Mighty and Very Valorous, born of women and can the lesser produce the greater?"

In the pride of his manhood, he replied:

"A strong plant may grow from a little seed."

"Yet is there more life in the little seed than in the great plant. Yes, unto endless seed and from one generation to another does that life continue."

"Life is the Father, the Mightiest."

"Fellowship is the only begotten Son of the Father, begotten of the Spirit before all worlds—and the name of the Spirit is Courage. And the nature of the Spirit is the nature of a mother. And these three be equal, Chingiz, Life, Fellowship and Courage—the Father, the Son and the Mother. Heaven and Earth meet to produce Man. In the soul of man is the light of Heaven, which he could

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

not perceive but with the eyes of Earth. For in Man also is the Trinity, which is a great mystery and the foundation of all faith. In his one person is Life and Fellowship and Courage, and without these he shall not exist nor survive, and without this belief he shall not continue. If he attempt to stand alone he shall fall and if he deny the sanctity of the family, whether human or divine, since the one is but a reflection of the other, he shall be cast down."

Chingiz said: "Now are my eyes opened to a great truth, and I know that my days are accomplished. But tell me first, oh! Wisdom, why this should have happened to me in the land of Tangut?"

She answered: "Old in learning is Hsia and beautifully have her feet moved in the paths of peace—even in the paths that lead over high mountains. And there has been a spirit in Hsia powerful to resist you, Chingiz, and lo! in this moment, that spirit is revealed unto you."

"If the land is conquered, how shall the spirit continue?"

"Being immortal it shall continue for ever and ever, and Hsia shall be remembered. On the face of deep waters and in the midst thereof shall the spirit pass. And it shall appear at different times in every quarter of the globe, in the North and in the South and in the West, but its abiding place shall be the East. For in the East men of calm countenance, knowing not fear, shall be aware of truth. But in the West also shall it find a home, for here men of ruddy countenance, like unto children, shall know fear, but shall honour the spirit and cleave unto it. And this shall be accounted unto them for merit. So the two ends of the earth shall meet within a common bond and East and West shall understand each other."

He said: "Shall this indeed be the end of my work on earth, to renew courage in men?"

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

She replied, "Even so, Chingiz. For you have been a scourge in the hand of the Mightiest and to that end were you destined from the beginning."

Then, for him, Time ceased and he saw the future and the past together. He saw that the conquered is stronger than the conqueror, and that out of darkness comes light, and that death is the prelude to birth.

Also he saw his own life as a series of little pictures crowded close, the whole no larger than the span of a man's hand, but very clear and bright.

A tiny Temudjin defied the thunder, and killed Baiktat by the hand of Juchi-Kassar, and suffered under the Taidjuts, and escaped from them, and established supremacy over his own tribe. His alliance with Wang Khan, and the friendship and treachery of Jamuka were there, and many fierce battles and the gradual growth of power.

He saw his campaign in Cathay and his invasion of Turkestan and India. Kushluk the Strong Man and Shah Mahommed, fleeing before his generals, stood out as pigmy figures and, on the high bank of the Indus, he beheld another pigmy, Jelal de din, in his last moment.

Then he saw himself, Chingiz, coming again to Tangut, and it seemed to him that a child tending flocks on the hillside, a child whom he had once taken up on his saddle bow, stood in his way and tried to bar his passage. But this time, he rode over the child, nor stayed to reason with it, and he conquered and ravaged the land, so that it appeared crushed for ever.

Yet, as he passed into the shadows and his own glory was hidden in cloud and smoke, the memory of Hsia remained, and out of Cathay and out of India and Persia and Turkestan trooped a host, arrayed in the lights of morning, whose radiance shone even from the East unto the West.

Like a blood red moon, sinking behind dark vapours he,
336

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

the conqueror, waned and they, the conquered, arose like the golden sun from a funeral pyre and revived the world.

Chingiz bowed his face in his hands and dreamed. Then Kurbeldjin Goa drew the signet ring of state from off her thumb, where he had placed it, and left it on the bed and passed out of the tent into the night.

And she went down to the river and was seen no more of men in the form of woman. But, when they searched for her up the stream and not down, they found a pearl embroidered sock caught in the rushes.

And the name of the river, at that point, is called to this day by the Mongols, Khatun Gol, the Lady's River.

History gives various accounts of the end of Chingiz Khan. According to some, he was struck by lightning, or fatally wounded by an arrow or poisoned.

The chronicle of Ssanang Setsen, on which the present story is based, describes that he was bewitched by a mortal woman whom he took to wife, Kurbeldjin Goa, the actual, beautiful and mysterious Queen of Tangut and widow of Shidurgo. This account has been chosen in preference to any other, for the mystic significance which probably underlies it.

It is recorded that Chingiz spent only one night with the Queen, of whose strange power he had been warned by Shidurgo. She makes no other personal appearance in the chronicle. But after that night, she came out of his tent and went down to the river and was never seen again. And thereupon Chingiz, bewitched, fell ill and died within eight days.

Supposing that she was mortal woman and that she took revenge on the conqueror. This argues that he, who had many wives and concubines, was so weakened at the last

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

by triumph as to fall an easy victim to feminine wiles. A poor but not impossible end for the super-man.

But if she were more than mortal, as Shidurgo suggested, if she embodied an idea, the idea of Prester John, that Chingiz must have pursued so vainly all his life, the conclusion surely fits the theme.

He died from the apprehension of truth—nobly, having attained the end of existence.

The conquest of Tangut revealed to him the immortal quality of Courage, which renews itself always from the ashes of defeat. No one figure of history in whom he had sought this quality had appeared capable of sustaining it. Yelui Tashi, Wang Khan, Kushluk, Jelal ed din, all had apparently failed. Yet all were touched with some of the glory of Prester John—a glory not dependant on sex or form or circumstance, and so often noticeable, nevertheless, as the attribute of the weak and the characteristic of Woman.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN the morning, his attendants found Chingiz Khan lying face downwards and unconscious, but still breathing, on the floor of his tent. They hastened to lift him and to pour strong wine between his clenched teeth.

The news, that their leader, who had never suffered from a day's illness, had suddenly and unaccountably been struck down, spread like wildfire through the camp and caused the utmost consternation. The wise men and priests of many persuasions flocked to the royal tent, to advise practical treatment or to exorcise the evil spirit that must surely have attacked the Khan.

He lay on the bed and seemed to sleep, but they could not wake him.

The Shamanist witch doctors struck brazen gongs, droned a weird chant and worked themselves into an ecstatic frenzy, but Chingiz did not stir. The Tibetan Lamas brought their prayer wheels and, crouching silently on the ground, set these instruments spinning rapidly that the holy salutation, "Om mani padme hum!" might rise unceasingly to Heaven and propitiate the Mightiest. The Mahommedans spread their carpets in the open and prostrated themselves towards Mecca, invoking the name of Allah.

A Nestorian priest, with sharp words of rebuke to the infidels, approached the couch of Chingiz and made the sign of the cross over the prostrate figure.

All sacerdotal efforts, inspired though they were by the deepest appreciation of the Khan's unfailing tolerance and the most extreme animosity to each other, were in vain.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

It was now the turn of milder reason. Chinese sages, prompted by purely ethical motives, recommended that the multitude within the tent should disperse and that fresh air should be allowed to enter, that heated bricks should be set at the Khan's feet and that pungent incense should be burned close to his head.

When Chingiz at last opened his eyes, they disdained the stimulating effect of kumiss and served him instead with tea, newly infused from the boiled soft water of the river. At the same time as they announced the joyful tidings of his revival, they enjoined the strictest secrecy as to his condition, which they considered serious. A strange weakness and lethargy held Chingiz as though fettered with iron bonds. He was unable to speak above a whisper, but in a whisper he assured his friends that he suffered no pain and that all was well with him. The night descended and his strength—that resilient and steel-like strength, which had been impervious to wounds and to hardships, did not return.

Instead, the next day found his great body a little weaker, a little more helpless, as though it lay like a giant trunk felled in the woodland and was aware of approaching disruption.

Fearful word went through the camp, "Chingiz Khan is dying!"

"Hush! say it not aloud! For if it be known, we are all undone. Chingiz is our life and, if he desert us, how shall we ever see the homeland again?"

Alas! Alas! Like a devouring and unquenchable flame, like an icy wind striking dread to the heart with the promise of winter, like the swift and sudden onslaught of an invisible foe, the rumour spread through the army.

"If it be false why does he not appear among us as he did aforetime? If it be true, how can we survive?"

"Oh! Chingiz Khan, father of your people, come again

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

from your tent as a conqueror, even the conqueror of Death."

"Oh! Chingiz Bahadur, comrade of your warriors, leave us not desolate !

"Oh ! Chingiz Beloved, there is none like you, none, and without you our hearts must break and our heads be bowed down !"

Hard bitten soldiers, the heroes of a hundred fights, wept like children. The care of the animals was left entirely to the women, who moved about their duties in sullen despair.

Horses looked to the uplands, which separated them by so many leagues from their home pastures, and whinnied aloud as though in fright.

Everyone was possessed by a paralysing doubt. How, deprived of the Khan's genius could they ever repass the great range of the Momo Khan mountains and the dread desert which lay beyond, to regain the Steppes of Mongolia ? It was *his* organisation that had brought them through. It was *his* power that had enabled nearly two hundred thousand to move as one man. Without his leadership, they must be dispersed like dust, or left to lay their bones in a foreign and hostile country.

At moments, their spirits were buoyed up with desperate hope. He, who had cared for them so well, would not betray them now. Long, long ago, young Temudjin had promised always to lead his people and Chingiz Khan had never broken his word. The Taidjuts, who had followed him, reminded each other how their fathers had tried to escape from the dominion of Yessagai's son, and how the boy Temudjin, carrying the standard, had pursued the fleeing multitude, led away by Todoyan and had said, "I am your appointed leader—I am your shepherd. Follow me instead." Then they had not listened, but afterwards the

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

wisest among them had given heed to his words, and had come in and surrendered to him. And he had forgiven the repentant, and had rewarded the faithful, and had been their ruler ever since.

Then up spoke grey Kiluken, the veteran, a trusted commander in the army. "Oh, fools, who consider only your own interests and forget all the lessons we have learned of Chingiz! Shall we stand in his path when he wishes to go his own way? What are our voices, but the bleating of a flock of sheep, when he is called by high Heaven to give account of the service he had rendered upon earth? I, who love him well and have served him long, say this unto you, that his spirit will surely remain with us if we believe."

Then resignation fell on the army, and the waiting multitude made way for Kiluken, that he should pass into the Khan's tent, to which he had been summoned.

Chingiz lay high on his great couch, his head propped with pillows and his body covered with furs.

All sternness had melted from his face and he wore a look of benign contentment. So might a patriarch of old have appeared, as he blessed his children and prepared to meet his God.

The Chinese councillor Yeliu Chutsai stood near, with hands crossed and hidden in the sleeves of his silk robe and eyes fixed on the ground.

Jagatai, the only son of Chingiz to be present, knelt beside the couch and held the Khan's hand.

Subotai the Valiant, that old and faithful comrade, leaned on his sword and bit his lip. Chebé Noyan crouched on the ground, like an animal in pain, with dumb rage and agony in his eyes. Also Baroul was there and Churchadai and many other friends of his youth.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

But one was only there in his thoughts, and that was Bortai.

Ah ! Bortai, did no voice reach you in the far distant homeland at that hour, to tell you of bitter loss ? Once, wrested from Temudjin, you ran to find him, through a rushing host, crying his name aloud in the dark night. Now that he is about to leave you for ever, you cannot reach him, the horse is not bred that shall gallop fast enough to overtake the steed he has mounted !

Yet as his spirit rides through endless space among the stars, somewhere, somewhen, your faithful soul shall hear him calling, as he did aforetime, " Bortai, oh ! Bortai ! " And answering, you shall be caught up on his saddle bow, his love, his dear, while flaming suns around you light the way to a new marriage feast. . . .

When Kiluken entered the tent, Chingiz Khan was speaking. His voice was stronger than it had been in the first days of his illness, but the old fire and purpose had departed from his eyes, and it was apparent that he was only sustained by his indomitable will.

" With me it is clear that I must separate from you and go away. The body that is born is not immortal. It goes hence, without home or resting place."

He saw his physical destiny so truly to the last. He knew well that that splendid frame of his which had so nobly enshrined a splendid spirit was but a house of clay which must soon crumble to dust. Yet that dust itself should find no home, no resting place. For ever must it be stirred by the life force to take new form of stone or root or worm, till at last, through perpetual evolution, it should appear again as man or super-man, whose name should be called Very Mighty

After a long pause, he spoke again quietly, reflectively. " The precious jade stone has no crust and the polished

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

dagger no dirt upon it. This keep in everlasting memory, the glory of an action is that it should be complete."

He saw the law of the Universe as a scheme of perfect symmetry. Its rule was rigid, hard as flawless jade, bright and merciless as polished steel. The greatest or least significant effort of man could only succeed through adherence to this rule: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do do it with all thy might." The finished action, the action unspoiled by doubt or carelessness, was the only one to be considered glorious. So many lives said to be wasted, because arrested in the flower of youth, have attained even in their last hour a point that has made them complete. So many others, said to be fulfilled, have departed unsatisfied, leaving behind them a sense of unfinished labour.

Once more Chingiz addressed them all, not looking to one of that little assembly more than to another, but gazing straight before him, through the open door flap of the tent towards the South.

"Firm and unbending is the heart of the man who keeps his plighted word. Be not guided by the wishes of others, so will you keep the goodwill of many."

Before all, each man must be faithful to himself. Let him not be guided by any human voice, not even by the voice of Chingiz, but only by his own strong heart, incapable of treachery. Only so might he rule and only so be loved.

Suddenly then, Chingiz looked towards Kiluken and became aware of his presence.

"Old friend," he said in a weaker but more natural voice, "I sent for you."

"I came straightway, oh! Khan," answered the veteran gruffly. His hands fumbled miserably with the iron helmet he had doffed, and he could not meet the Khan's eyes, into which there crept a faint expression of distress.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

"I knew you would not tarry, comrade. I have this to say to you, that I have said already to the others. Be a true friend to my wife, Bortai, and to my sons Ogotai and Tului. Promise me this, as Munlik promised my father Yessagai. Munlik was faithful but there were traitors in the camp in those days."

"There are no traitors in your camp now, oh ! Khan," said Kiluken. "I promise."

"Believing this, I can depart in peace," said Chingiz with a smile of assurance. "After me Ogotai shall reign. This is just for he is my first born. But my dominions must be divided among all my sons. Juchi shall have the country from Kwaresm to the borders of Bulgar and Saksin. You, Jagatai, shall have the land from the borders of the Uigur country to Bokhara, and Ogotai, set over all, shall have a special uluss near to Imil in the Dzungarian region."

A clerk of the Uigur tribe standing in a corner of the tent made haste to record the Khan's words. Then, with his ink brush poised above his tablet of rice paper, he waited expectantly for more.

"Will you not send some particular message to Tului oh ! my Father ?" said Jagatai.

Chingiz sighed. "Tului must fight no more. He sheds too much blood. Therefore let him stay in the home country and have the care of the Imperial house and family. Tului's son, Mangu, shall reign after Kuyuk, the son of Ogotai. And after Mangu, Kubilai will sit on my throne and will, as I have done, secure high prosperity. The words of the boy Kubilai are very weighty ; note what he says, note it all of you. I have spoken."

He closed his eyes, as though intense weariness had overtaken him.

It was very still in the tent. The day was closing. Behind the western mountains, the sun sank in a blaze of

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

glory that spread rosily over the southern sky. Across the threshold of the pavilion, that sacred threshold which none but a royal foot might touch, the waning light came stealing, to fall on the royal bed.

Chingiz stirred and suddenly sat upright. His face was as they had so often seen it at the opening of a great campaign, implacable. His blue eyes shone like flames. With his right arm he pointed to the West. "Forward!" he shouted in a strong voice.

Then his body dropped.

The first sound that broke the silence came in a long drawn moan from Chebé Noyan.

They placed the huge Imperial tent, with its furniture all standing and the body of Chingiz undisturbed, on an enormous cart, which should be drawn back to the Kentei Khan region by a team of forty-five oxen, yoked abreast in five lines of nine. To reach the homeland by the Kerulon river, where the conqueror must be buried, they would have to traverse a large part of Tangut and the terrible Gobi desert. The whole army, with its tents, its flocks and its herds followed the funeral car.

Kiluken led the first line of oxen, Subotai, the second, Chebé Noyan the third, Baroul the fourth and Churchadai the fifth. Jagatai stood in the doorway of the tent and, from the forefall of the car, directed all the teams.

And as that immense procession moved forward, obeying the dying command of their Khan and still controlled by iron discipline, all the Mongols wailed together as with one voice.

And the sound of that lament was so awful, that the whole earth seemed to shudder and Heaven itself wept tears of rain. Words were in that wailing, but the grief behind the words could only find vent in the wolf-like howls of men and the shrill screams of women.

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

"In times which are gone, thou didst swoop like a falcon before us ! To-day a car bears thee on as it rumbles advancing !

Oh ! thou, my Khan !

Hast thou left us indeed ? Hast thou left wife and children ?

Oh ! thou, my Khan !

Hast thou left us, hast thou left the Kurultai of thy nation ?

Oh ! thou, my Khan !

Sweeping forward in pride, as sweeps forward an eagle, thou didst lead us aforetime,

Oh ! thou, my Khan !

But now thou hast stumbled and art down, like a colt still unbroken,

Oh ! thou, my Khan !

Thou didst bring peace and joy to thy people for sixty and six years, but now thou art leaving them,

Oh ! thou, my Khan !"

So they chanted, and the great car, as though impelled by some irresistible force, stronger than that of oxen, went forward along steep stone-paved roads that wound up over the terraced hills.

But at last there was no longer a road. The sweating teams struggled on through deep mud, towards the pass in the Momo Shan Mountains. The wheels of the funeral car sank deeper and deeper into the blue clay. Before they could reach the summit, they came to a standstill. The tremendous load had stuck fast in the wet ground and could not be moved. The oxen were flogged with long whips and encouraged with shouts. They bent their heads and strained every muscle, but in vain. Ropes were attached to the car, on which men pulled with all their might. Their

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

Asia. His dependants were summoned from all parts to attend the funeral obsequies and some, to show him honour, came a journey of three months.

At last the immense procession reached a great forest in the Kentei Khan region, and the site of the sepulchre was chosen in a large open space, where only one majestic tree stood like a monarch.

It was recalled that Chingiz had always loved the woodland and some said, that on a past occasion, he had visited this actual spot and had expressed admiration for the king of the forest.

Subotai the Valiant was chiefly responsible for this idea, for he was of the Uriankhai tribe, the forest dwellers, inhabiting that region, and keeping herds of reindeer. A thousand of these tribesmen were now appointed to be guardians of the Imperial tomb.

Around and below the funeral car, on which the tent still rested, the ground was deeply excavated.

Then, during three days, the sons and people of Chingiz made offerings to his memory.

An immense treasure of gold, silver and precious stones was cast into the burial place and, when all sacrifices had been completed, even to the last libation of kumiss poured out in the name of the army, work went forward day and night to cover the abode of death with newly turned earth.

It rose eventually, not as a mere mound, but as a hill of considerable dimensions, close to the giant tree. And around it they built eight small houses of white stone for the Guardians, as places of prayer.

Chingiz slept.

The great tree grew and throve. As it grew, little seeds fell in quantities from its leaves. Some of these seeds rotted in the ground. Some gave food to birds. At last

A SERVANT OF THE MIGHTIEST

a few took root. Then they burgeoned into tiny plants. Before they could grow to any size, most of them were weeded out by the Guardians.

Every year this happened. Every year a few little seeds, a few little plants escaped destruction and, escaping, continued the process of reproduction. The efforts of man were like the struggles of a puny infant against the irresistible Law.

Time passed. The Uriankhai were engrossed by the business of existence. They had to build their huts of birchwood and tend their herds of reindeer. The descendants of the Guardians allowed the prayer houses of white stone to fall into disrepair, and neglected the grave of Chingiz, from which a few saplings sprang. Brushwood gradually covered its lower slopes. The slopes themselves subsided and crumbled away.

As the generations followed each other, the great tree withered, became a hollow trunk, fell in a winter storm. . . . Its children covered the land. The forest hid the hill. . . . The last resting place of Chingiz was lost for ever.

But through the impenetrable taiga, where he had always found a way, his spirit moved, free and immortal, speaking with the voice of whispering leaves, acknowledging the Mightiest. . . .

Ming...
Quincy...
BIBLIOGRAPHY

- HISTORY OF THE MONGOLS. Jeremiah Curtin.
HISTORY OF THE MONGOLS. Sir H. Hoyle Howorth.
TRAVELS OF MARCO POLO (2 vols.). Yule, edited by H. Cordier.
NOTES AND ADDENDA, VOL. 3. Henri Cordier.
RUSSIA, CHINA AND MONGOLIA (2 vols.). J. F. Baddeley.
THE JOURNAL OF FRIAR WILLIAM DE RUBRUQUIS (1253). Hakluyt.
THE VOYAGE OF FRIAR JOHANNES DE PLANO CARPINI (1246). Hakluyt.
RUSSIAN TRAVELLERS IN MONGOLIA AND CHINA. Piasset-sky.
HISTOIRE DE GENTCHISCAN. Gaubil.
INTRODUCTION A L'HISTOIRE DE L'ASIE. Léon Cahun.
HISTOIRE DES MONGOLS (vol. I). D'Ohsson.
HISTOIRE DU SULTAN DJELAL ED DIN MANKOBIRTI. Mahommed en Nesawi, trans. by Houdas.
PEINTURES DES MANUSCRITS ARABES, PERSANS ET TURCS. Blochet.
INVENTOIRE ET DESCRIPTION DES MANUSCRITS ORIENTAUX. Blochet.
MEDIAEVAL RESEARCHES (2 vols.). Bretschneider.
CATHAY AND THE WAY THITHER. Yule.
TRAVELS IN TARTARY. Abbe Huc.
THROUGH ASIA. Sven Hedin.
SERINDIA (vol. I). Stein.
THE MIDDLE KINGDOM. Wells Williams.
UNKNOWN MONGOLIA (2 vols.). Carruthers.
THE FAR EAST. Little.
A SHORT HISTORY OF CHINA. Boulger.
THE GATES OF INDIA. Sir Thomas Holdich.

Central Archaeological Library,

NEW DELHI.

38886
Call No. 923.1517/cw/wk

Author—Wingate, A

Title—A Servant of The
Mightiest.

Borrower No.

Date of Issue

Date of Return

"A book that is shut is but a block"

CENTRAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL LIBRARY
GOVT. OF INDIA
Department of Archaeology
NEW DELHI.

Please help us to keep the book
clean and moving.